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Turkeys roasted...

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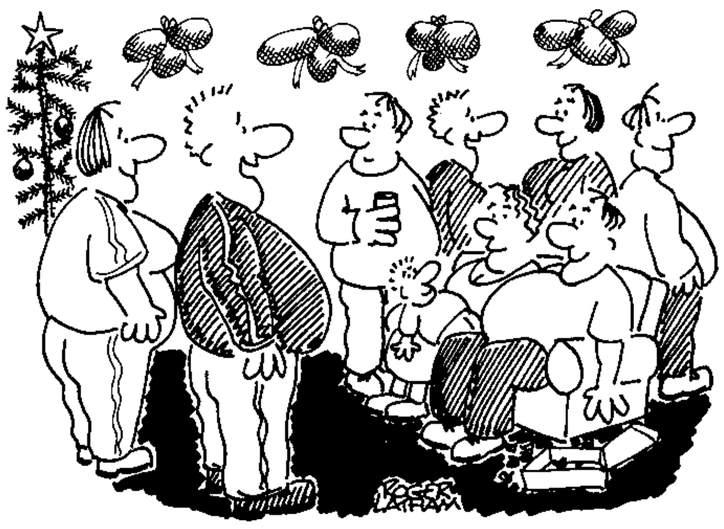
"I HAVE learnt that if a clever trader or money manager wants to get around the controls and processes that are in place, they will find a way," wrote Nicola Horlick in the *Times* back in January, after it was revealed that rogue trader Jerome Kerviel had mislaid $7bn of Société Générale's cash. "Increasing the burden of regulation is not necessarily the answer. Next time there will be a different set of circumstances, a different cast of players and another victim or victims."

And lo, it came to pass, as Bernard Madoff was arrested this month and charged with defrauding investors of around $50bn. One victim, losing around £13m, was the British firm Bramdean Investments, headed by one Nicola Horlick, who enthused in the *FT* back in May that "Madoff is someone who is very, very good at calling the US equity market. This guy has managed to return 1 percent to 1.2 percent per month, year after year after year."

So who does Horlick feel is at fault now? Certainly not herself (she told the *Evening Standard* that any questions about her own role in the affair were "all about people thinking that women's pictures on the front pages sell newspapers"). No, in Horlick's opinion, Madoff's actions "appear to point to a systemic failure of the regulatory and securities markets regime in the US."



"It's lovely to see the whole distended family together at Christmas"

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PO Box 326, Sittingbourne, Kent ME9 8FA.
Subscription enquiries: 01795 414 871
Overseas: +44 (0) 1795 414 870 Fax: 01795 414 555.
Web: www.subsonline.co.uk
Email: private-eye@servicehelpline.co.uk

SUBSCRIPTION RATES
£28 per annum. Europe and Eire £34. Airmail (rest of world) £38.
Cheques/POs to Private Eye. Mastercard/Visa.

ADVERTISING
Ten Alps Publishing, 9 Savoy Street, London WC2E 7HR.
Email: private-eye@tenalpspublishing.com
Display: 020 7878 2366 **Classified:** 020 7240 9129

Published by Pressdram Ltd, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN. **Printed** by BGP Ltd, Bicester OX6 7QZ. **Distributed** by COMAG Tavistock Road, West Drayton, Middlesex, UB7 7QE. Tel 01895 433600.

ABC

JACQUI SMITH sent a blistering letter to her Tory shadow Dominic Grieve earlier this month, urging him to show more "respect for the law" by condemning all Whitehall leakers.

To assert that leaks are not serious if they don't relate to national security, she declared, "is not just a cavalier attitude to take, it is a wholly irresponsible one and entirely unfit for those who seek to hold high office".

Last week Smith's colleague Andy Burnham appointed a new chairman of Ofcom. It is to be Colette Bowe – famous as the DTI civil servant who leaked to the Press Association a letter from the solicitor-general to Michael Heseltine during the Westland scandal of 1986. She was put up to it by another civil servant, Bernard Ingham, who wanted to discredit Hezza.

But the culture secretary clearly takes a cavalier attitude to leakers, as Bowe will now collect a salary of £200,000 for up to three days work a week chairing Ofcom. We look forward to Smith's announcement that Burnham is "entirely unfit" for high office.

NUMBER CRUNCHING

-$2.1bn Loss made by Goldman Sachs in past three months

+$2.6bn Bonuses being paid to Goldman Sachs staff anyway

FOOT IN MOUTH

NO SOONER had the last *Eye* pointed out that Michael Foot, appointed by Alistair Darling to review Britain's offshore tax havens in the wake of the financial crisis, had been rather close to them over the years than Foot himself appeared to prejudice his own review by telling *Accountancy Age*: "I can't see where the regulation failure is supposed to be."

Foot, an ex-managing director of the Financial Services Authority, might start by looking at a National Audit Office report on the "overseas territories" last year. It set out a string of failures in banking, insurance and money lending regulation.

Then there's the small matter of banking secrecy in most tax havens and the absence of published accounts for companies, trusts and other wacky structures that have made the world of high finance so incomprehensible that nobody knew what was going on until it was too late. If Foot really can't see where regulation has failed, perhaps he should make way for someone who can.

To maintain a safe and secure environment, we would be grateful if you would not bring your knife to court in future.

Security leaflet for HM Court Service

RIGHT FIRST TIME...

"In the shitty shares were down, er ... in the City shares were down...."
– Brian Hanrahan, The World at One, *Radio 4, 12 December*

IN mid-November the *Observer* savaged the shadow chancellor with a front-page splash headed "Osborne faces storm over warning of run on pound", which seemed to have been taken down at dictation speed from No 10.

"George Osborne was at the centre of a political storm last night," it reported, "after being accused of lacking judgement in predicting a 'run on the pound'."

And what was the *Observer* splash a month later, on 14 December? "Pound slips below euro. Government faces backlash over plans for economy as pound declines." Poor judgement indeed!

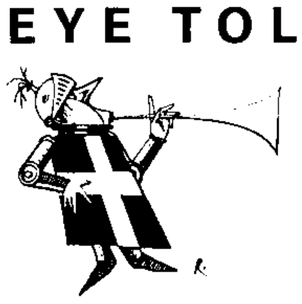
SCHOOLS secretary Ed Balls and skills secretary John Denham have together found the perfect man to run the new National Apprenticeship Service.

The organisation will try to get young people properly trained for employment, a task made much more difficult by the financial crisis. This has not deterred Denham and Balls from recruiting their apprenticeship supremo, Simon Waugh, from the financial sector, though. Balls is sure his new recruit "will bring his trademark vision, enthusiasm and drive" to the job.

Waugh is currently chairman of AWD Chase De Vere Wealth Management, which one month before Balls recruited him was fined a record £1.12m by the Financial Services Authority for mis-selling pensions.

Undeterred, Denham hailed Waugh's "wealth of experience" and "valuable eye". Waugh's firm is, however, becoming a lot less wealthy and valuable – AWD Chase De Vere is selling off two divisions as it tries to recover from £10m of projected losses this year.

EYE TOLD YOU SO



IT WAS the week before Christmas when MPs finally caught up with *Private Eye* and accused Mr Justice Eady and solicitors firms Carter-Ruck and Schillings of allowing plutocrats to use "Soviet-style" libel laws to silence journalists and authors.

Labour MP Denis MacShane said: "The willingness of British courts to allow wealthy foreigners who do not live here to attack publications that have no connection with Britain is now an international scandal." For the Tories, Michael Gove warned that libel lawyers were stopping legitimate investigations into radical Islam.

Two cases familiar to *Eye* readers dominated the debate at Westminster Hall: Eady's decision to order the banning of Rachel Ehrenfeld's *Funding Evil* at the behest of Saudi billionaire Sheikh bin Mahfouz; and the Iraqi billionaire Nadhmi Auchi's silencing of press criticism (both *Eyes passim*).

Liberal Democrat MP Norman Lamb even quoted from the *Eye* as he accused Auchi and his lawyers, Carter-Ruck, of using the threat of defamation proceedings to wipe critical reports from the web. They may not be on the Web, but they are still in the *Eye*!

● *See US Pepper Spray, page 7.*

Street Of Shame

REHABILITATION happens fast with Rupert Murdoch. Tunku Varadarajan, a former *Times* leader writer, quit the *Wall Street Journal* last year, dropping dire hints that Murdoch's ownership would mean the end of the *Journal* as a civilised paper after his own experience at the *Times*. But now he knows better.

"Murdoch has not ruined *WSJ*, as many feared he would," he wrote in *Forbes* magazine two weeks ago. "In fact, in the estimation of not a few, he has already made it a better newspaper."

Tunku's generous tribute to the Digger has been immediately rewarded. Last Wednesday he was invited to write an op-ed piece for his old paper, the *Times*, about the joys of cricket.

ANNOUNCING 90 job cuts at the *Independent* last month, chief executive Ivan Fallon claimed the move would "mark a step-change in using the *Independent*'s unique pool of talent to produce great quality newspapers at the lowest possible cost."

Leading by example, he stepped into the breach himself, snaffling the press tickets to the RSC's West End production of *Hamlet* which was due to feature David "Doctor Who" Tennant (in the event replaced by his understudy Edward Bennett) and penning the *Indy*'s review.

At least *Observer* columnist Peter Preston can see a brighter future. "The *Independent*, sale steady after October's slump, can walk in to the *Mail*'s Kensington atrium next month with its chin held up," he wrote.

No other media observer is half as cheerful about the *Indie*'s future as Preston. But then no other observer is the proud dad of the paper's executive editor, Ben Preston.

"FALSIFYING evidence is embarrassing for a minister responsible for fighting crime," thundered a *Sun* editorial after the home secretary was forced to apologise for releasing incomplete figures on knife crime. "But nobody believed Ms Smith – even BEFORE statistics chief Sir Michael Scholar blew the whistle."

Nobody? One paper certainly appeared to, declaring in its editorial four days previously that there was "reason enough to welcome the small fall in knife crime that has followed a police crackdown in a few targeted areas… Those caught carrying knives are now three times more likely to end up where they belong: behind bars."

Its name? The ever-credulous *Sun*.

TOP TIP for the Christmas number one? Gordon Smart, showbiz editor of the *Sun*, informs us in his 11 December column that "Alphabeat have teamed up with Sam Sparro to record a brilliant Christmas song… Slade's classic *Merry Christmas Everybody*. You won't be surprised to hear it's as camp as Christmas."

Don't rush to the bookies just yet, though… Island Records, home of Sam Sparro, informs excited fans that "it's rubbish. Totally made-up story."

VERY LATE NEWS

"The *Eye* understands that Robert Napper was interviewed in Broadmoor by at least one senior detective… No further action was taken."
– Paul Foot on the Rachel Nickell murder, Eye 911, 15 November 1996

"Broadmoor patient Robert Napper has pleaded guilty to killing Rachel Nickell in 1992… An Old Bailey judge said Napper would now be held in Broadmoor indefinitely."
– BBC News, 18 December 2008

THE *OK!* Christmas party was a lavish affair. While *Daily Express* and *Daily Star* staff had their parties and even their Christmas cards cancelled this year, minions on the celeb-studded rag mixed with the "stars" at London's Living Room: Abi Titmuss rubbed shoulders with Luke Marsden, Mario Marconi put his hand up Lisa Appleton's skirt (*Who they? – Ed.*)

Alas! Richard "Dirty" Desmond, proprietor of *OK!*, took one look at the photos of his chavtastic party pals drunkenly groping each other and flashing their bare bums and ordered his *OK!* logo to be digitally removed from the background of the pix before filling a page of the *Star* with them. The accompanying text coyly reported that this year's *Big Brother* stars "were out in force at a London bash" without mentioning who hosted it. "I am not having my magazine associated with smutty arse pictures like that," he explained.

Without any sense of irony, Dirty Des then ordered his hard-pressed skeleton staff to start all over again on his TV and Christmas magazines. "I want to see loads more tits and bums," he roared.

DESMOND might be kicking most of his subs on to the streets, meanwhile, but at least he is rewarding staff in the rest of his Northern & Shell publishing empire.

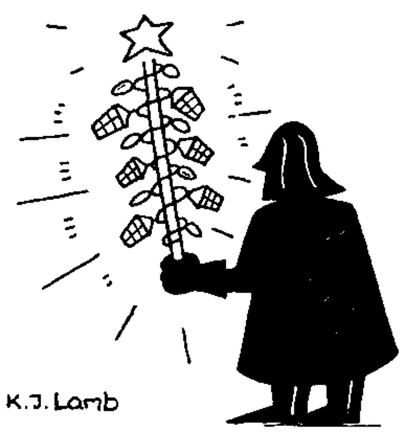
Female editors at N&S must have been particularly gratified to receive a Christmas goody bag of beauty products from their generous proprietor.

Typically, however, Desmond hadn't actually dipped into his own wallet for this display of seasonal goodwill. No sooner had he got wind that a batch of cosmetics freebies was being delivered to the front desk at *OK!* than he dispatched a post-boy to intercept them and bring them up to him. They were then sent on to all senior female executives – including, of course, the editor of *OK!*

HATS OFF to London *Evening Standard* editor Veronica Wadley for organising the paper's Christmas auction on eBay, which raised £200,000 for Greenhouse, a charity helping deprived youngsters.

Proving that it pays not to be too scrupulous about who you have dealings with when there's money to be made for good causes was lot 50 (winning bid £2,500): "Financier Christopher Moran will take 10 people round Crosby Hall, his Tudor home in Cheyne Walk – never before open to the public."

Not quite true – Crosby Hall *used* to be open to the public but hasn't since Moran got his hands on it. Previous *Eyes* have pointed out that in 1982 the "financier" became the first person in 300 years to be voted out of Lloyds of London; he was disbarred for life for "discreditable conduct". In 1986 he was censured by the London Stock Exchange for his role in a dodgy shares transfer and in 2002 he was fined $2m by a New York court for insider dealing.



Darth Vadar and the Christmas lights-sabre

"Well, you have to admit this 'Russian Roulette' makes a pleasant change from charades"

***GRAUNIAD* hacks arriving at their new Kings Place HQ last week were presented with an introductory handbook designed at enormous expense by Gilles and Cecilie, purveyors of twee artwork to other cutting-edge media organisations such as, er, Harvey Nichols, Credit Suisse and Cartier.**

Useful information, such as the location of the loos and restaurant, is tricky to find among the 68 pages of self-regarding bollocks about "sustainability" and "creativity". Even the maps are confusing, unless you happen to know what a "think pod" or a "culture hub" is.

Elsewhere the handbook, "ironically" designed to look like a child's picture book, is scattered with random slogans, as might be found on a ten-year-old's sticker-plastered lunch box: "working together", "first thing in the morning", "going new ways", "sharing hands", "because we want to", "I love nature", "pass the sickbag". [*Spot the one we made up. Ed.*]

Staff arriving last week, meanwhile, were taken aback to discover, in a "culture hub" window facing a local council estate, what looked very much like a bullet hole.

So what is a "culture hub", anyway? According to the *Grauniad*'s PR supremo Julie Taylor, it is an "integrated pool of talent for all those working in creative fields". What used to be called an "arts section", then.

And a "think pod"? That, according to Ms Taylor, is "a space where it is possible to go and work in a quiet environment, with a door". What in the fuddy-duddy old days was called "a room".

"*DAILY Mail* editor Paul Dacre, the nation's bully-in-chief, is, like all bullies, a coward," thundered the *Guardian*'s Polly Toynbee last month.

"The stance his paper takes on just about everything is so internally contradictory and inconsistent that he could never survive even minimal scrutiny. The *Mail*'s mishmash of lurid scandal, bitching about women and random moralising zigzags all over the place, dishing out pain and praise often according to who it has succeeded in buying with its limitless chequebook, or who has infuriated it by selling their wares to another bidder."

Don't tell Polly, but one of the most successful beneficiaries of the *Mail*'s chequebook has been her own employer. Such *Mail*-tastic tales as "Is your prawn cocktail toxic?"; "Kate Garraway: Yes, I lied about my age"; "The hell of holidaying with another family" and "I took my little grandson to play in the woods. So how on earth did we end up being frogmarched home by police?" all appeared in Dacre's paper or website in return for a handsome syndication payment after they had run in that most internally contradictory of titles, the *Guardian*.

MIKE ATHERTON was hired as chief cricket correspondent of the *Times* earlier this year with much fanfare and at huge cost. A fine writer he is, too, but he may still have a thing or two to learn about chasing down a scoop and beating off his Street of Shame rivals.

The *Daily Mail* was cock-a-hoop last week after its exclusive back-page report that Texan billionaire Sir Allen Stanford (see In the City, p33) was about to walk away from his funding of a series of lucrative matches between England and a West Indian XI. The story originated with former West Indies star Michael Holding, who had texted Atherton and the *Mail*'s Paul Newman, both of whom were in India covering England's tour. Newman frantically looked into it and filed to London. Athers, on the other hand, decided the matter could wait another day while he met up with a few chums for dinner.

CHRISTMAS PHOTO BUBBLE COMPETITION

QUEEN MEETS PORN KING

MANY people may be unaware that Her Majesty the Queen recently had the pleasure of meeting Richard "Dirty" Desmond while doing her bit for his Norwood charity. But readers of Desmond's *Daily Star* were treated to extensive coverage of the event.

Indeed, hacks at the *Star* were so inspired by the story they came up with a number of captions for the accompanying picture of Brenda and their proprietor. Strangely, their contributions did not make it into print, and they will be reproduced in the next *Eye*.

Meanwhile, *Private Eye* readers are asked to do better. Send submissions to the usual address. The winner will receive a year's subscription to the *Eye* and will be published in the next issue.

HOW NEW JOURNALISM WORKS

THE Dirty Digger's online service Down Under, news.com.au, has issued a list of its 100 most-read stories in 2008, which will no doubt be read with keen interest by Will Lewis and his digitally deranged colleagues at the *Telegraph*, who think the quality of journalism is measured by the number of "hits" it achieves.

"As another year draws to a close we could ruminate sagely from the journalistic tower on the defining moments of 2008 – the global financial crisis; terror in Mumbai; the China quake; the historic election of a black president in the US," the Digger's editors report.

But why bother? At the top of the chart, "Woman's fishy-smelling mystery solved" is just beaten into first place by "Heath Ledger died of 'drug overdose'". Other favourites include "The secret diary of a call girl", "Man 'had sex with girl in Perth, mum made video'", "Man's penis stuck in park bench", "Naughty Nikki caught out on Facebook", "Baby Lali born with two faces" and "Raunchy new Miley Cyrus pictures leaked".

And where are the Mumbai attacks, or indeed Barack Obama's election, in the top 100? Er, nowhere. No doubt Lewis, like his hero Rupert, will conclude from this that readers don't want serious news, merely filth and freak-shows. But, as the Australian newsletter *Crikey* asked last week, who's really to blame for such an insipid list – "readers and their lowbrow tastes, or the editors, journalists and web editors who continue to push these tabloid stories on the masthead's front pages"?

SACKWATCH

Triumph Of The Will

WHEN not trying to bully the residents of Sark into submission last week, the weirdo Barclay twins found time for another of their favourite pastimes: threatening lawsuits against other newspapers that dare to write about them.

The *Telegraph* proprietors are among the loopiest litigants in Fleet Street history. They once sued the *Observer* for printing their date of birth. Not to be outdone, their son/nephew Aidan Barclay issued legal threats against the *Evening Standard* because it reported that he had a house in London. David and Frederick Barclay sued foghorn-voiced hack John Sweeney – in the French courts, with typical perversity – for mentioning that they had a residence in Monaco, claiming that this revelation put them at risk of "kidnapping, deprivation of freedom and terrorist attacks". A decade later, however, when they used French law to sue the *Times* in Paris, their spokesman explained that there was nothing odd in bypassing the British legal system, "given that they live for much of the time in Monaco".

"I see you're back in the paper..."

This time their target was Roy Greenslade of the *Guardian*, who wrote last week that the Barclays didn't give a toss about *Telegraph* journalists, whose work was no longer valued by either their owners or editor Will Lewis. The *Grauniad* replied that this was fair comment and left the article on its website.

Will the batty billionaires now sue? They might struggle to disprove Greenslade's comment, given how many of the paper's best hacks have been summarily fired over the past fortnight. Since the axing of the obituaries editor, the literary editor, columnists Craig Brown and AN Wilson, and sportswriters such as Brough Scott and Alison Kervin, the blood-letting has continued unstoppably. Even those who survive are taking a beating: columnist Vicki Woods has had her pay halved, while former editor Charles Moore has been told to write two weekly columns for the same fee he used to receive for one.

The carnage has been bloodiest in the sports department, where four subs came into work on 5 December only to leave without a job by the end of the day. Sub-editors are now being asked to cover football matches free to slash freelance costs, and to fill the gap left by the two staff football reporters for the Midlands and North, Martin Smith and Tim Rich, who have also been ditched.

Smith has been replaced by a 23-year-old sub called Sandy Macaskill, who has little writing experience but does have the invaluable qualification of being cheap – and of having attended the same school (Westminster) as chief football correspondent Henry Winter. Winter's rather more stylish colleague, Patrick Barclay, has wisely jumped ship for the *Times*.

Talking to the *Indie* three months ago, *Telegraph* editor thirsty Will Lewis produced evidence that his paper wasn't dumbing down: crossword editor Kate Fassett had just introduced a second daily cryptic crossword, "the most fiendishly difficult daily puzzle on Fleet Street". You can guess the sequel: last week Fassett was made redundant.

Not a happy ship, then? Perish the thought. Greenslade's criticisms provoked an epically demented riposte from the blog of the *Telegraph*'s assistant editor Justin Williams, one of the countless *Daily Mail* interlopers. Anyone would think, he protested, that the *Telegraph* office is "some kind of hellhole run by psychopaths who have no interest in the kind of quality journalism that once marked the paper out". This seems a pretty good summary of the atmosphere at 111 Buckingham Palace Road, but from his vantage point in the "training room" Williams has a different view. Hacks such as Craig Brown and AN Wilson were dropped "because their work was no longer what it once was", but "what they leave behind is a publisher with more intellectual big beasts than anywhere else in Fleet Street". Such as? Simon Heffer, Ambrose Evans-Pritchard, Janet Daley – and, er, "Bryony Gordon and many, many more". Even Bryony "Breasts" Gordon herself might be surprised to learn that she is now an in-house intellectual.

Where has Lewis been during the serial-killing mayhem of the past fortnight? Lying very low indeed. According to one old *Telegraph* hand: "It is the mark of the man that he can't bear to look people in the eye when dumping them." So he subcontracts the dirty work to his less timorous henchmen.

But Lewis did eventually emerge from his hiding place on the evening of Friday 12 December to send an email to all staff – including those who had left a few days earlier after being fired. "Thank you for your hard work this week," he whimpered. "We have been through a tough time together and yet our newspapers and website look and read better than ever." If, that is, you overlook the illiteracies and misprints and the startling decline in intelligent reporting and comment.

Lewis urged them to keep suspending their disbelief: "I know that some of you will have seen some critical comments about us in other newspapers and websites. Is it any surprise that our jealous competitors spend their declining days throwing abuse at us? Ignore this commercially driven bile, and instead remember you are part of the most talented editorial team in the UK."

Hardly any of his few remaining staff believe this, and disgruntled *Telegraph* readers know it's nonsense. Which leaves the question: does even Will Lewis believe it? If so, there's only one explanation. Just as dogs come to resemble their owners, so the flailing editor is now as crazy as his proprietors.

PS: While other papers reported the Barclays' petulant tantrum in Sark last week, the *Mail* titles ignored it. This is quite deliberate: the *Daily Mail* and *Mail on Sunday* have a self-denying ordnance that prevents their hacks writing anything that shows the twins in a bad light. The idea is that once the Barclays have wearied of wrecking the *Telegraph* they'll allow Associated Newspapers to step in and take over the company. But of course this depends on not antagonising the touchy twins beforehand. Hence the remarkable silence.

GORDON'S FLEXIBLE FRIENDS

GORDON BROWN has promised parliament he will "take whatever action is necessary" to stop credit card companies "charging exorbitant rates". He even ordered Lord Mandelson and consumer affairs minister Gareth Thomas to hold a summit with the credit card industry to stop lenders "significantly hiking up people's rates" and to make sure they pass on rate cuts.

But why do they need a summit when Labour already has such good relations with some of the offenders?

PayPal has branched out from running online payments into the credit card business, and its plastic responded to falling interest rates by, er, increasing its APR to more than 15 percent. Lord Birt, a good friend of Mandelson and a former Blair adviser, is a director of PayPal.

Provident Financial, which specialises in "sub-prime" loans to Britain's poor, even trumps PayPal: its "Vanquis" credit card has a "typical" APR of 38 percent. Provident Financial managed to come up with an even worse deal with its "EasyShop" storecard for Argos shoppers, which has an APR of up to a staggering 222 percent.

By chance, Provident Financial is also very close to Labour. Ministers including Ed Balls, James Purnell and Tessa Jowell have all spoken at Provident Financial-funded meetings at the party conference, as have former ministers Charles Clarke and Ruth Kelly. The firm also helps fund many Labour-linked think-tanks, and in 2005 paid Brown's favourite think-tank, the Smith Institute, to hold a "round table" discussion on "financial inclusion" with Balls and pensions minister Stephen Timms.

MONEY TO BURN

THE controversial Airwave digital radio system is still giving the government headaches, this time holding up the £380m FireControl project to replace the 46 separate emergency-service control centres with nine regional centres, hooked up by a lot of technology.

Fire minister Sadiq Khan announced last month that the overall project was running five months late, and that the opening dates for the first three control centres have had to be pushed back nine months to summer 2010. Khan blamed the delays on "a number of difficulties with the ICT".

Primary contractor EADS Defence and Security has told the IT press that it is still waiting for FireLink, which will provide communication between centres and fire engines. FireLink is an upgraded version of Airwave, the vastly expensive police radio system condemned by the National Audit Office and the Commons public accounts committee for its cost (*Eyes passim*).

But at least one part of the new system is ready to go. The brand-new regional control centre in Taunton is sitting empty at a cost of almost £5,000 a day, waiting for the rest of the FireControl plans to catch up. Figures obtained by Forest of Dean MP Mark Harper revealed that for October alone, the unused centre cost £140,839 to maintain.

CALLED TO ORDURE

JOHAN Eliasch and Quentin Davies, who both defected from the Tory party last year to join Gordon Brown's "government of all the talents", appeared recently in front of Commons select committees. Did someone say "talents"? Shurely shome mishtake.

Swedish stockbroker Eliasch was a member of David Cameron's big-money set until he unexpectedly jumped to Labour and was made Brown's "Special Representative on Deforestation and Clean Energy". When he appeared in front of the environmental audit committee the adjective should perhaps have been "silent" rather than "special".

Eliasch has had the personal satisfaction of having his name affixed to the grandly named "Eliasch Review" of rainforest financing which was launched a couple of months ago. But is it any more than an ego trip for the Swede?

At the environmental audit committee he spent much of the time gazing into the middle distance, picking food out of his teeth, looking at his heavy, silvery wristwatch and generally radiating immense boredom. Add to that his shaved head, guttural accent, a prosperous-looking suntan and a habit of shrugging when answering questions, and the no-doubt entirely unfortunate image was of some political blow-in who had little urgent interest in the subject. What he did say was either hard to understand or contained that fashionable bullshit word, "robust".

Eliasch appeared alongside two civil servants from the Office of Climate Change. One of these was called Graham Floater - a good surname for someone studying global warming. Floater and his mate took most of the technical questions, Eliasch sitting between the two of them, gazing imperiously at nothing very much. All in all, not an impressive performance.

Immediately afterwards the committee heard from a couple of macrobiotic eco-activists, one from Greenpeace, the other from Friends of the Earth. They were much livelier and full of scorn for Eliasch. Alas, the prime minister's special representative had not seen fit to hang about to listen to their interest. No doubt he'd rushed off to save the world, or maybe earn himself a few bob on the stock market.

The infuriatingly patrician Davies, meanwhile, was to be found in front of the defence select committee, discussing government arms deals. Unlike Eliasch, Comrade Quentin wouldn't STOP talking, to the extent that the committee started groaning audibly at his long-windedness.

Ex-Tory MP Davies, who was made a defence minister in the autumn, hasn't yet got the hang of being a Labour man. He irritated the hell out of his new party colleague Dai Havard (Lab, Merthyr Tydfil), partly by talking down to him like a squire addressing a peasant (Mr Havard is, let us say, not a member of White's), partly by getting his name wrong. He called him "Mr Harvard". Dai HATES that.

Havard kept asking brisk, sceptical questions about the engineering of the MoD's next generation of armoured cars. When Davies started waffling, Havard interrupted him. "So far you've not allowed me to finish one answer," drawled Davies.

Havard: "You make them so long!"

Former shadow defence secretary Bernard Jenkin (Con) filled in the time by doodling an unflattering cartoon of Davies which was then shown to other members of the committee, creating widespread mirth.

The MPs did some useful digging on Whitehall's relationship with US arms dealers General Dynamics. Its UK arm is chaired by Lord Levene who is (how handy!) a former arms buyer at the MoD. Dynamics has recently had a row with the government over a deal to design a possible new armoured vehicle.

James Arbuthnot (NE Hants) asked if the MoD was about to pay Dynamics a retainer, even though the vehicle might not be going ahead. Davies again dodged the question, so it looks as though Dynamics may indeed be about to receive a large wodge of public money for, er, doing nothing.

Like Eliasch, Davies tried to pass the buck to a couple of generals and a civil servant who were sitting on the witness table alongside him. The civil servant, Amyas Morse, was asked if the Dynamics negotiation conducted by Davies was "the most disastrously mishandled deal" in MoD history. Morse drily replied that "I am not in a position to make that relative judgement". In other words, there may have been a more disastrous deal, but not in recent history.

'Gavel Basher'

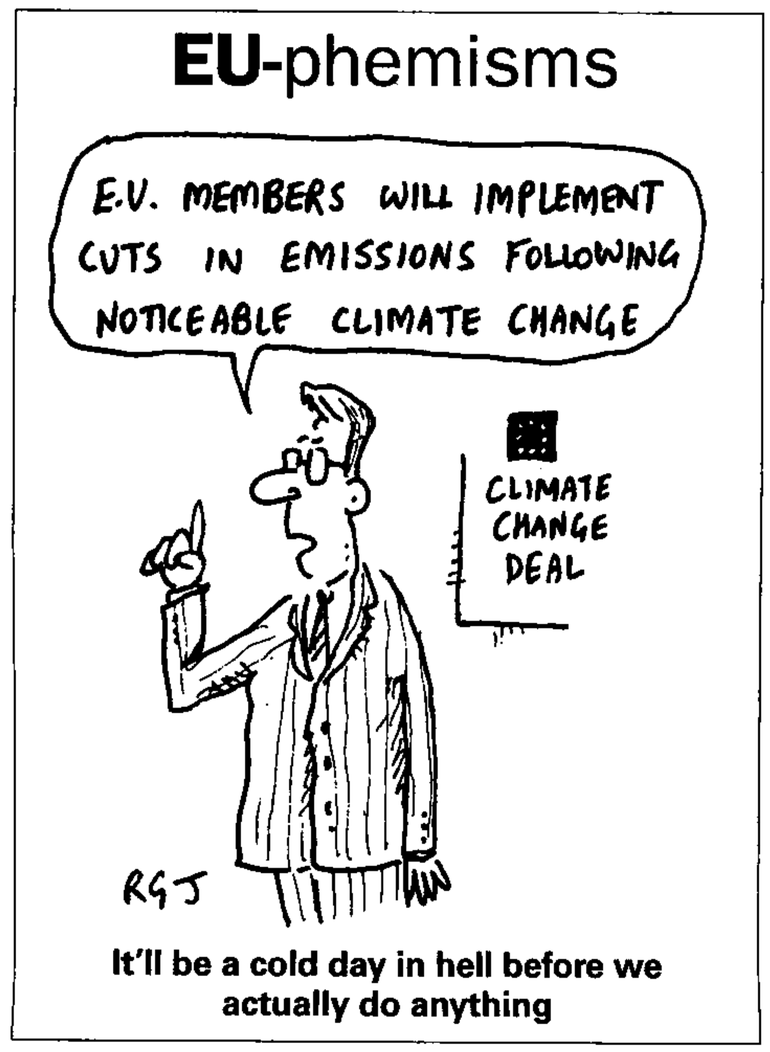
BRUSSELS SPROUTS

AS IT was foretold, so it came to pass. The *Eye*'s prediction that Ireland would vote again on the Lisbon treaty in late 2009 (*Eye* 1224) proved uncannily accurate.

But the declarations made at the December 11-12 European summit about Ireland securing vital guarantees, and thus responding to the wishes of those who voted against the treaty the first time round, were pure political theatre.

In fact, when Ireland votes again, it will vote on exactly the same treaty that it rejected before. Not one single word will change. The only serious concession granted to Ireland is that, rather than the cull of European commissioners foreseen by the treaty, every EU country will now keep an appointee in Brussels. But the legal instrument allowing this will only be adopted at a later stage, once Lisbon is in place.

On other issues, such as Irish neutrality, Taoiseach Brian Cowen supposedly heroically wrested concessions for his people. But these are smoke and mirrors. Particular suspicion hangs over the question of abortion, which Irish government surveys showed was a major concern for Lisbon naysayers. But objective evidence for this is scant, and the Lisbon treaty would anyway not have touched on Irish law in this area. Surely it couldn't be that this issue was raised just so Cowen could secure a guarantee on it, as part of constructing the justification to vote on Lisbon again? Surely not. That would be a preposterous idea!



It'll be a cold day in hell before we actually do anything

U.S. PEPPER SPRAY

THE FBI recordings of the governor of Illinois gloating about how he could sell Barack Obama's vacant Senate seat stunned hardened Chicago hacks. "I've got this thing and it's fucking golden and uh, uh, I'm just not giving it up for fucking nothing," chortled Rod Blagojevich. "Unless I get something real good, shit, I'll just send myself [to Washington]."

The toughest among them are taking the story on by investigating the links between Blagojevich and the British-based Iraqi plutocrat Nadhmi Auchi. When they do, they risk threats from Carter-Fuck, previously unknown to the great city of Chicago.

Auchi (left), Blagojevich (right)

As the *Eye* reported in June, Auchi was a business partner of Tony Rezko, a slum landlord and big shot in the Illinois Democratic Party. Rezko helped Barack and Michelle Obama buy a mansion at the same time as he was in partnership with Auchi to develop 62 acres along the Chicago River. In June a jury found Rezko guilty of shaking down firms looking for Illinois state pension business and diverting the takings to Blagojevich's campaign fund and his own pockets.

Auchi was always in the background of the case. He got to know Chicago's Democratic elite when Blagojevich welcomed him as an honoured guest at a reception at Chicago's Four Seasons hotel in spring 2004. Alongside them was Aiham Alsammarae, a dual US-Iraqi citizen who was later jailed in Baghdad while accusations that he corruptly exploited his post as electricity minister in the post-Saddam government were investigated and then overturned.

Obama was also at the hotel but said he did "not recall meeting" Auchi or Alsammarae.

It was Auchi's last visit to the US. In 2005, the State Department refused him a visa because a French court had given him a 15-month suspended prison sentence for his part in the Elf-Aquitaine scandal. Auchi still says he's not guilty. The State Department may also have been influenced by a report from the US Baghdad embassy as long ago as 1960 (years before Saddam Hussein's Baath Party seized power), which said that an Iraqi show trial had convicted Auchi over allegations of being a member of and receiving weapons from the then underground Baath Party.

Before the Rezko trial, the judge revoked Rezko's bail because he had not told the court about $3.5m he had received from Auchi's General Mediterranean Holdings. Prosecutors feared Rezko might use it to flee the country. Court papers show that that they also believe Rezko had written to the State Department in November 2005 "to request that Auchi be allowed to enter the United States and, it appears, asked certain Illinois government officials to do the same".

Meanwhile, records filed with the Illinois secretary of state's office show that Christopher Kelly, head of Blagojevich's campaign fund, pledged all his shares in a Nevada land partnership as collateral for a loan from General Mediterranean.

Auchi certainly likes to get close to politicians – and not only in Chicago. He gave directorships at his General Mediterranean companies to our own Keith Vaz, David Steel and Norman Lamont. In 1999, on the 20th anniversary of his arrival in Britain, 130 MPs including Tony Blair and Charles Kennedy signed a congratulatory card.

Not that British readers can learn about his connections. Such is the repressive state of the English libel law that the *New Statesman*, *Observer*, *Guardian* and others have pulled critical pieces from their websites rather than confront a convicted fraudster.

America is a freer country, and when the US investigative journalist Evelyn Pringle received a threatening letter from Alasdair Pepper of Carter Fuck, she replied:

Dear Mr Pepper,

Although you have never informed me of your client's objections to my articles, it has been brought to my attention that you are attempting to intimidate sites that publish my work by threatening to sue them for defamation.

I ask that you cease this tactic immediately. Your actions are not only violating my right to free speech but they are also adversely affecting my business relationships and livelihood.

I will gladly defend any action filed against me in the US by your client. However, in order to sue me he would have to appear here before a jury and you and I know he is not allowed in this country. Therefore, your actions represent harassment and unlawful intimidation of a professional journalist.

If I get any more reports that you are trying to sabotage my relationships with publications, I will contact the US attorney, Patrick Fitzgerald, and the US Department of Justice to seek legal advice on how to put a stop to your illegal conduct.

Truly,
Evelyn Pringle

That's the way to do it.

'Ratbiter'

DE MENEZES INQUEST

DESPITE the efforts of the coroner to gag the jurors deciding the inquest into the 2005 police shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes, an innocent going about his daily business, they still managed to deliver a damning indictment of police conduct that day.

In doing so, the ordinary men and women of London showed how crucial it is to the justice system that deaths at the hands of state (or indeed while in state care or custody) are subject to detailed public scrutiny and accountability. But if ministers have their way, they will soon legislate to hold some inquests in private on the grounds of national security. It's easy to see how an inquiry into a badly bungled anti-terrorist police operation could end up taking place behind closed doors. If the powers are there, the police will use them.

The government tried to sneak through the measure to remove juries, relatives and the public from certain sensitive cases in the detail of the counter-terrorism bill but dropped it in the face of opposition. But it will certainly resurface in the new law to reform the coroners' service, announced in the Queen's speech – thereby undoing recent advances (thanks to human rights legislation) that have substantially widened the scope of inquests to inquire into all circumstances surrounding a death and allow juries to make detailed findings in a "narrative" verdict that enables lessons to be learned that might prevent tragic events being repeated.

Indeed, in the De Menezes inquest, coroner Sir Michael Wright allowed a pretty full exploration into the wider aspects surrounding the death. But then - some might argue cynically – he not only restricted the verdicts available to the jury (allowing only a lawful killing or an open verdict), but he also prevented them making that all-important narrative verdict. Instead he allowed only "yes" or "no" answers to 12 set questions – it was this second constraint (not the decision over unlawful killing verdicts) which was the final straw, prompting the walk-out by the family's lawyers.

Unlawful killing verdicts in such cases are always difficult. Following court rulings in other police fatal shootings, such as that of Harry Stanley who was shot by police who mistook a table leg in a carrier bag for a gun (*Eyes passim*), officers cannot be held responsible if it is their "honest belief" that a person posed an immediate threat – even if the victim clearly, like Mr de Menezes, posed no threat. Thus it was unlikely, though not impossible, that the jury would have returned an unlawful killing verdict against the two men who shot Mr de Menezes, even if they had been allowed to.

However, the jurors' responses to the coroner's 12 questions suggested that had they been allowed to, they might have brought in a "gross negligence manslaughter" (ie unlawful killing) verdict to reflect the litany of police operational failings from the beginning of the surveillance of Mr de Menezes to the final seconds before officers fired seven bullets at point-blank range into his head.

Their replies to those limited questions made it clear they believed a series of omissions and failures by police had contributed. Police hadn't bothered to get better photographs of the real suspect, Hussain Osman, even though they were available; those in charge did not know where the armed-response units were (one should have been outside the block of flats where Osman and the hapless Mr de Menezes lived); there was a lack of communication which meant those in charge thought there had been a positive identification when there had not; there was a failure to stop Mr de Menezes before he reached first a bus, then a Tube station (where a real terrorist would have posed the greatest threat); and, crucially, commanders ignored a request from a surveillance officer that they detain Mr de Menezes in the ticketing hallway of the station. (The officer, known as "Ivor", told the jury that he and his colleague could have done this with minimum use of force.)

But the coroner could have asked another dozen questions and got equally damning answers about the failure to staff and resource the operation properly; the failure to brief firearms officers about the risk of mistaken identity; the failure to carry out a proper recce of the area to determine where a suspect would be most safely stopped; the failure to ensure radio equipment was working, etc.

A verdict of gross negligence manslaughter can only be brought if an individual or individuals are responsible for a series of errors or if there is a systemic failure – not if different people get different things wrong. But lawyers for the family alleged that there was indeed a series of serious failings by each of the three people in command of the operation that could justify such a finding - deputy assistant commissioner John McDowell (the "gold" commander on the day), DAC Cressida Dick (the senior designated officer) and her tactical adviser, chief inspector Vince Esposito.

By so restricting the jurors' room for manoeuvre, it meant that when they delivered their findings, though they clearly believed Scotland Yard had been at fault, no one individual could be held accountable.

From his summing-up, it is clear that Sir Michael Wright sympathised greatly with the officers who shot Mr de Menezes. He told the jury to put aside emotion and deal with facts – but then, when considering the stark contrast between the accounts of the civilian witnesses on the Tube and those of the firearms officers, he suggested the jury might recall how a tough, fit and highly trained officer broke down in tears to "assist you in assessing the depth of the emotional experience that he was going through". He even suggested that if the jury decided the officers were lying, about for example shouting a warning before opening fire (rejected by the jury), it might be in order *to "mitigate the impact of what might be a... tragic mistake"*. Usually lying on oath is considered to be perjury and is frowned upon whatever the circumstances.

TV

Rick Stein's Food Heroes: Christmas Special (BBC2)
Nigella's Christmas Special (BBC2)
Christmas at River Cottage (C4)
Willie's Perfect Chocolate Christmas (C4)

AT ABOUT 8.40pm on the Wednesday before Christmas, Nigella Lawson and Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall were simultaneously making spiced vodka on different channels. At least when it happens with buses, you might actually have been waiting for one. In all, three hours of programming on BBC2 and Channel 4 that night were devoted to Christmas cookery shows.

The problem with this genre is that there is isn't much to say but network controllers, in a seasonal reflex, provide vast amounts of time in which to say it. At least when Delia takes on Winter, Gordon does Fish or Keith tours Australia, there are lots of variations of taste and place for them to explore. But the British Christmas meal is famous for its lack of variation: turkey, sticky pudding, mince pies. Once Nigella's told us that goose can be really good instead, there's little left to do. So the dominant tone of these programmes is desperation.

Nigella's Christmas Special, for example, began, quite inexplicably, in Paris. Carrying on as usual like someone given the words "porn star" in a game of charades, the hostess pouted and simpered beside the Seine about how she "loved the sophistication" of the French, but preferred her Christmas food to be "simpler". Even so, presumably to justify the travel budget, she would be trying to incorporate some tips from Parisian patisseries and boucheries in her own winter table.

After this two-minute monologue-travelogue, she was back in the pretend London house with the pretend friends that she uses for her cookery shows. Most of it was the stuff she does at any time of year, including the flow of sub-erotic imagery: "Road to temptation... amber swell of syrup... like to dive right in... something about that waxy chewy feel." But, remembering that this was the Christmas edition, she stuck some cherries on that crunchy chocolate cake she's made before and pouted that they were "glacé cherries as red as Rudolf's nose". Sticking a plastic reindeer on top, she leered: "I think the expression 'camp as Christmas' comes to mind."

Over on **Christmas at River Cottage**, Hugh F-W seemed to have been tipped off that he was going up against Nigella and was trying out some tactile metaphors: "I do just love the feel of suet dough trickling through my fingers: so soothing!"

Like his rival on the other side, he was having trouble doing something different with the traditional fare. "This year, I've decided to give my Christmas Pud a twist," he declared. "I'm going to make Christmas roly-poly!" In a further departure from tradition, he was going to use venison suet. Having completed the dish, he announced: "I guess you could call this a Rudolph Roly-Poly..." – Could you? Why? – "...so let's make sure he's got a red nose!" He sloshed some alcohol over it.

On Rick Stein's **Food Heroes: Christmas Special**, they were having even more trouble fulfilling the seasonal remit. Having run out of animals, vegetables, fish and parts of the world as an excuse for a series, Rick's latest format has him visiting plucky producers of good local produce. "My wish is that everyone tries to buy local food as much as possible," he pleaded.

Most Christmas food, though, is mass-produced, especially during a recession, and they couldn't have Rick wandering round turkey farms. So he found a farmer's wife who raised geese. "What I'm dying to do is cook a goose. For someone special – like you!" she told the presenter. Given her age and job, it seemed likely that she had cooked geese before and, throughout, there was something worryingly bogus about the exchanges.

In a period of tough scrutiny of TV, cookery shows have become nervous of fakery – Fearnley-Whittingstall actually has a recipe going wrong – but Stein, for presentational reasons, seems to become someone who knows nothing about food. "So how do you cook a goose?," he asks the farmer's wife, and: "So you can use the fat as well?" But surely, as a super chef, he must know the answers to these questions.

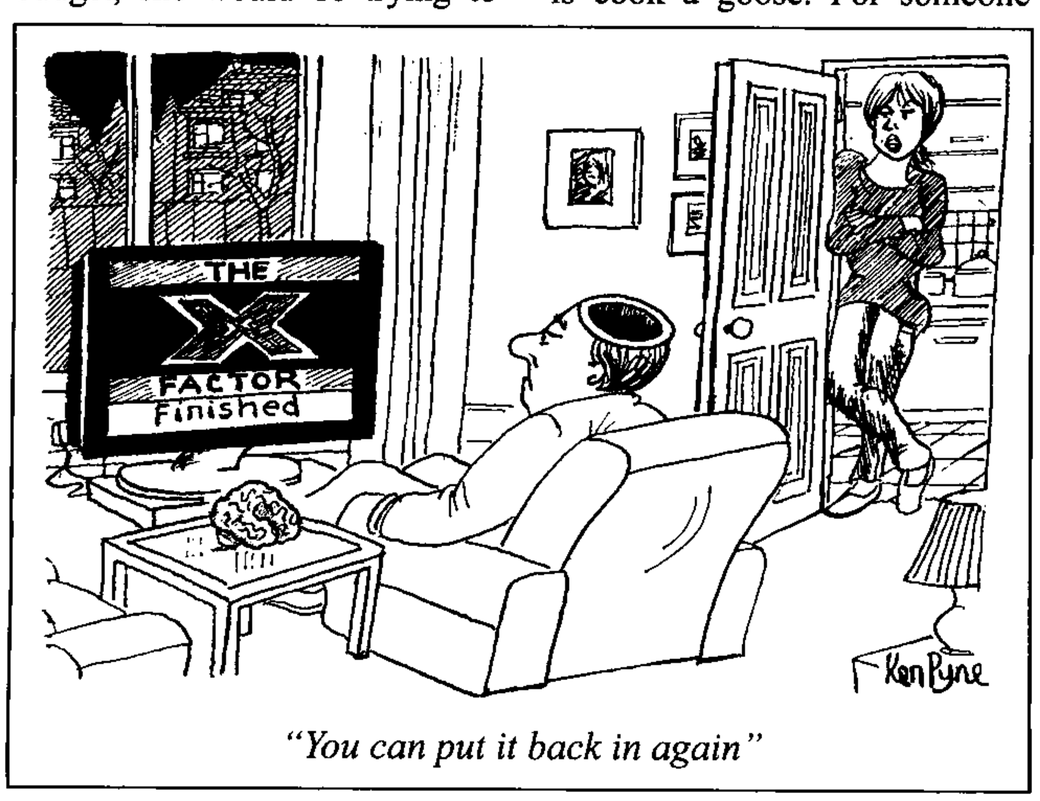
Desperate to find another vaguely Christmassy item, Rick went to a Stilton factory where he tasted some of the cheese and commended its "creaminess... and the blue vein." It's such expert insight that makes this genre so worthwhile.

Willie's Perfect Chocolate Christmas showed that Ofcom is having some impact with its clampdown on smut on Channel 4. A year ago, the show would have been Christmas's Perfect Chocolate Willie. C4's food department seems to have a fondness for double-barrelled toffs and so Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall was now succeeded by chocolatier Willie Harcourt-Cooze.

If the other had trouble tinselling-up their usual recipes, W H-C faced an even bigger challenge: he had to get chocolate into everything. So what about pancetta-and-chocolate stuffing for your turkey? Or chocolate mince pies? For a starter, he flaked a dark bar over some avocados. Did no one, at commissioning stage, realise that it was going to be tough to get an entire Christmas menu from someone whose speciality is sweets?

The problem is that cookery shows are a horribly limited format. There are only so many dishes and only a few possible camera shots: pouring, kneading, stirring, frying, slicing, tasting. And, at Christmas, there are even fewer possibilities. So it takes a particular scheduling genius to have two of each on two channels on the same night.

'Remote Controller'



"You can put it back in again"

NUMBER CRUNCHING

231,000
Number of people who saw man's assisted suicide on digital channel Sky Real Lives

2,193,000
Number of people who saw it on front page of Daily Mail, which called its broadcast a "cynical and exploitative decision"

"It's the Con-Con"

AD NAUSEAM

WHAT a difference a year makes. In December 2007, John Grogan, chairman of the all-party parliamentary beer group, called Sir Terry Leahy, chief executive of Tesco, "the godfather of British binge drinking", referring to Tesco's bulk discounting of alcohol.

Tesco responded in outrage, saying the company played a "leading role" in tackling binge drinking. In February, it said it was willing to work with the government on legislation to limit its ability to sell cut-price booze. But the credit crunch, of course, has changed everything.

Tesco's bumper Christmas ad, starring Des O'Connor, offers "2 for £12 Big Pack Beer". Doubles all round (on Tesco)!

FOR SOME months now Volkswagen's advertising agency DDB has been running press ads expounding the many undoubted virtues of the Golf Match.

In its wisdom, however, it has chosen to illustrate the ads with a picture of a Volkswagen carrying the numberplate NBG 212. Presumably none of DDB's creatives or photographers, nor anyone at Volkswagen, for that matter, is aware that "NBG" is a fairly well-known expression among people of a certain age meaning "No Bloody Good". Shome mishtake, shurely?

FOR several years all Woolworths' ads went out with the tagline "More Great News from Woolworths".

Then, at the beginning of this year, the line was quietly dropped. Given that the news to come out of Woolworths has been decidedly not great – downright disastrous, in fact – did ad agency BBH know something the public didn't?

SAINSBURY's big Christmas splurge brings Ant and Dec on to the same screen as Jamie Oliver for a couple of hoary one-liners and some party nibbles.

It is, Sainsbury's claims with great gusto, the first time Ant and Dec have appeared in an ad for seven years. What Sainsbury's isn't adding is that the last company the pair blessed with their winning smiles was… Woolworths!

DUMB BRITAIN

The Weakest Link, BBC1

Anne Robinson: What is the Christian name of the Archbishop of Canterbury? It's also the name of a native British tree.

Contestant: Yew.

AR: The English name for each of the days of the week ends in what letter?

Contestant: D.

AR: In education, what name for a large lizard is also a term for a prefect?

Contestant: Iguana.

AR: In medicine, a cochlea implant is designed to stimulate which of the five senses?

Contestant: Could you repeat that please, Anne?

MEDIA NEWS

IN WHAT must have been a simple error, BBC1's *Breakfast* managed to report that 8m viewers watched rival ITV's *X Factor* final.

Meanwhile, ITV and Sky News both concluded that the true viewing figure was nearly 15m.

MORE on how the BBC intends to slash costs as it faces up to not being able to flog off Television Centre and other properties by 2013.

BBC journalists worried about further budget cuts (see *Eye* 1224) will not be cheered to learn about a confidential presentation to execs given by John Turner, the corporation's head of financial strategy, in October. Warning that "significant property disposals" had to be delayed, he unveiled a plan to cut £145m from BBC budgets by 2010. Nearly half the savings will come from the journalism department, which he calls "staff-heavy", although some of this will be met by delaying payment for sports rights. "Additional efficiencies" are being considered.

THE BBC's coverage of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in Poznan was delayed somewhat when some of the BBC team were stranded at Stansted airport before the talks began.

The runway had been closed by activists from "Plane Stupid", protesting about climate change caused by CO_2 emissions from the aviation industry. Perhaps they should have gone by train.

THE editorial standards committee of the BBC Trust has, after almost a year of deliberation, delivered its verdict on a *Newsnight* documentary about Ecuador and the fight of indigenous people against Chevron Texaco, one of the biggest environmental lawsuits ever.

Two bold claims in the programme – that President Chavez of Venezuela had bunged the government in Ecuador $250bn to face down George W Bush, and that the oil company Occidental had been kicked out by the current government – were found to be totally false. Complainants included the Ecuadorian National Assembly, several ministers and the embassy in London.

So will the BBC be broadcasting a public apology? Er, no. Ecuador is a country far, far away, so the glaring inaccuracies have been written off as "an error in editing".

ANDY ALCORN is a student whose hobby is computer programming. Three years ago he designed a desktop "widget" for Apple Macs which allowed users to tune in directly to the full range of BBC radio stations and have them on in the background as they worked, rather than having to search out individual web pages to do so.

He estimates that the free software has been downloaded at least 200,000 times. At the peak of its popularity, around 65,000 people were using it to listen to the BBC.

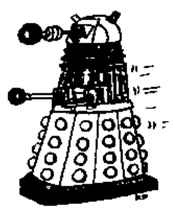
In October he was contacted by the BBC, which had tracked down his private mobile number and home address. Was it to thank him for the extra listeners he had pushed in the corporation's direction, or offering him a job on the technology staff? No. Instead, the "BBC Litigation Department" informed him that while "the BBC does not object to the reference of the BBC services… you do not have the authority to reproduce the BBC logo and as such the use of it amounts to infringement of the BBC's registered trade marks and of its copyright."

Alcorn was ordered to remove the logo from the widget, where it appeared in a little box enabling people to know what they were listening to, and "provide signed written undertakings that you have undertaken this step and that you undertake not to repeat your actions in the future" or face legal action.

All BBC logos have now been replaced on the widget with the letters B, B, and C, and licence fee-payers can now sleep easier in their beds.

"We'll split the gold, frankincense and myrrh"

BIRTSPEAK 2.0



Those BBC co-operation proposals in full…

"One possibility is that iPlayer could become a federation of on-demand PSB services. Users could access this federation via a single broadcaster-neutral central site."

Trans: you will be able to watch old programmes from lots of different channels on your computer.

"The BBC has been developing a standards-based open environment for internet-connected television… This standard would be designed to offer consumers an integrated broadband and broadcast service, free-to-air and accessed through a single, simple user experience."

Trans: you will also be able to watch them on your telly.

"The partnerships described above could be supported by a number of enabling contributions from the BBC."

Trans: the BBC is going to share nicely.

THE REAL MESSAGE OF CHRISTMAS

"The atmosphere in our city is agitated because this woman is visiting and with incredibly shameful behaviour provokes a wild and lustful enthusiasm. Thoughts of lust, impure thoughts, impure acts, are an offence to God and a dirty stain on our heart."

– Cardinal Jorge MedinaEstevez, Prefect Emeritus of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, condemns singer Madonna during a homily at Mass in praise of former Chilean dictator and mass-murderer Augusto Pinochet

POPEYE

FORM 696 is a risk-assessment questionnaire issued by the Metropolitan Police to pub and club licensees in the capital ahead of "significant events" featuring live musicians.

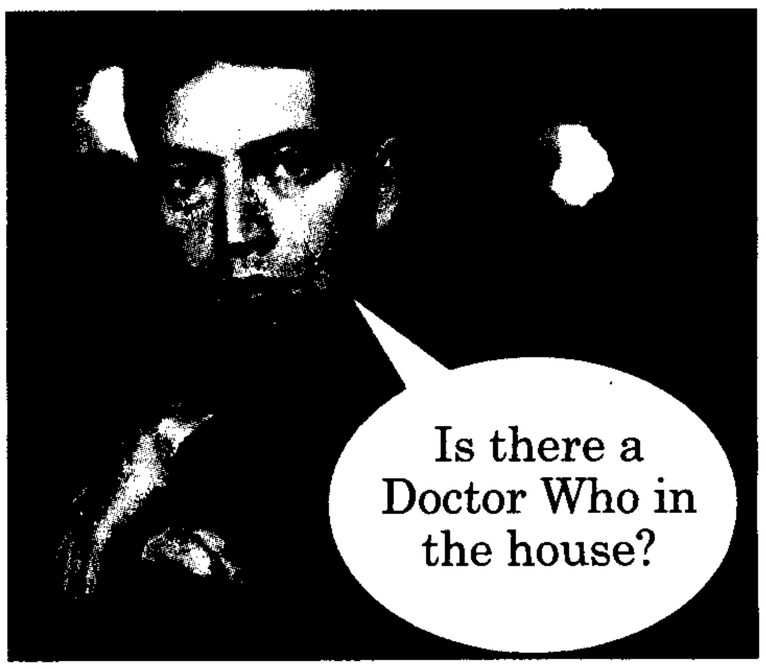
It requires them to provide, at least two weeks prior to the occasion, a name, address, contact telephone numbers and a date of birth for every performer, as well as details of "any other knowledge of the acts or of crowds attending that would need special considerations to be made to limit crime and disorder, eg problems at previous venues, the make-up of the patrons, whether they are local or are expected to travel from long distances to the event, etc."

But what counts as a "significant event"? One man at a piano? Four old ladies singing madrigals? A soundclash between the Brighouse and Catterick Brass Band and the Dagenham Girl Pipers? All of them, possibly. The Met will only say that it covers "any occasion where there will be a live performer(s) – meaning musicians, DJs, MCs or other artiste; that is promoted in some form by either the venue or an outside promoter; where entry is either free, by invitation, pay on the door or by ticket. Licensees are advised to consult the local Metropolitan Police Licensing Unit to clarify whether their proposed event is significant."

A clue, however, was provided by one question on the original Form 696: "Is there a particular ethnic group attending – if 'yes', please state group."

After loud protests by musicians including former Undertones singer Feargal Sharkey, Jon McClure of Reverend and the Makers and more than 6,000 others who have signed the latter's petition on the Downing Street website, that question has been quietly removed by the Met. A suggestion as to exactly which music fans are being targeted, however, remains in the edited version of the form: "Music style to be played/performed (eg Bashment, R'n'B, Garage)".

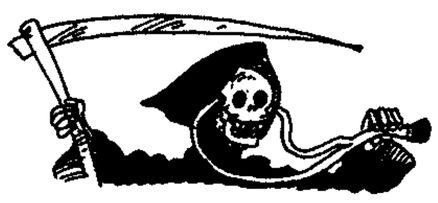
RSC: HAMLET UNDERSTUDY STEPS IN



SUPERMODELS

KERBER

MEDICINE BALLS



Fostering success

LET'S hear it for Andrew Foster, chief executive of Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh NHS trust who discovered his hospital had the worst mortality rates in the north-west and then actually did something about it.

In common with many NHS bosses, Mr Foster pays Dr Foster (no relation) £40,000 a year to analyse his hospital's data and warn him if it compares unfavourably with the rest of the NHS. In May 2007, Dr Foster told Mr Foster that his death rate following a heart attack was 2.5 times what was expected, and for fractured neck of femur it was even worse (2.8 times). So he got the relevant consultants together and analysed why this might be so. It seemed that "outliers" – patients treated on non-specialist wards when the specialist wards were full – were far more likely to die.

A "right patient/right ward strategy" was implemented, but alas the overall hospital mortality ratio continued to rise, peaking at 140 in December 2007 (100 is the average). Foster realised that heart attacks and broken hips were making a relatively small contribution to the overall deaths, and what was needed was for everyone in the hospital to focus on reducing unnecessary deaths.

"First do no harm" would seem a fairly obvious strategy, but New Labour has hit the NHS with so many targets that keeping people alive gets buried at the bottom of the pile. Just as destructive is the culture of weary cynicism among staff and resistance to any more change. When Foster first took his mortality statistics to the consultants at a hospital grand round, he was met with predictable resistance ("the figures must be wrong, crude mortality doesn't tell you anything, these patients are old and frail and going to die anyway", etc).

But Foster persisted, got the consultants to acknowledge the problem and even paid for senior managers to attend motivational courses at the Institute for Healthcare Improvement in America (at £6,000 a pop). The result appears to have been a transformation in the culture of the hospital where the avoidance of avoidable death (rather than keeping Labour happy) is now the number one priority.

The trust introduced so many changes, it's hard to say which had the biggest effect. All patients are treated on specialist wards where possible; a cohort ward was set up specifically to isolate and treat those with MRSA and *C. diff*; a new antibiotic policy was introduced and implemented; everyone went bare below the elbows whether they wanted to or not; all deaths were analysed weekly and unexpected deaths closely scrutinised. Data was collected that specifically looked for problems.

Each ward now has to report to the hospital board in seven areas (infection prevention and control; falls assessment; food and nutrition; medicine prescribing and administration; pain management; patient observations; and pressure area care.) Unexpected admissions to intensive care are analysed, as are all cases of ventilation assisted pneumonia. As Foster puts it: "What gets measured, gets done." And the result? The hospital mortality ratio plummeted down to below 100 by last August and has stayed there. In September, the latest full month figure was 81. There have also been big falls in MRSA in the blood and *C. diff* in the stool.

In the first six months of 2008, there were 154 fewer deaths than in the same period in 2007. A few doctors remain to be convinced ("we're just prolonging the inevitability of death, rather than saving lives") but if you're stuck in Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh NHS trust over Christmas, your chances of getting out alive are much better than last year. Good luck!

M.D.

SIGNAL FAILURES

£estive £are

RECESSION, rising unemployment, cheaper petrol and fears of deflation won't stop passengers getting their traditional new year greeting at the railway ticket office.

Train firms have never experienced a shrinking economy. Since privatization, their business has grown no matter how poor the service or how steep the fares. With employment high, soaring house prices obliging people to commute further, choked roads and parking that was either scarce or costly, train firms had to invent ways to price people *off* overcrowded trains.

Now that unemployment is rising, however, Stagecoach is preparing for a decline in commuting. Its instinctive response is to raise unregulated fares by more than 7 percent at East Midlands Trains and South West Trains (general inflation is 4 percent), but its greed could yet backfire as people curb their spending.

Businesses surveyed by British Chambers of Commerce reckon rail fares are too high. Even expense-account travellers taken to the cleaners so keenly by Virgin (London-Manchester "anytime" return: £387 first class, £247 standard from next month) could diminish.

The biggest hike in unregulated fares next month is 11 percent on Arriva CrossCountry (ACC). As ACC's franchise started, there was anger that fares would rise 3 percent above inflation annually; in 2008 there were rises of 7 percent in January and 3 percent in May, when ACC's confusing new ticket restrictions forced even bigger rises on many passengers (*Eye* 1211).

After profits grew so fast for so many years, train firms are determined recession won't spoil the party (only one, London Midland, is freezing unregulated fares). They won't admit greed is behind the rises, so the Association of Train Operating Companies (Atoc) prepared an elaborate list of pathetic excuses.

"Since 1996, in real terms, overall rail fares have risen by just 5 percent," it said. Really? Latest government statistics show rail fares rose 17 percent above inflation from 1996-7 to 2007-8. And that ignores bans on cheaper tickets at peak times. In 1997 a Birmingham New Street to Bristol return cost £23.30 for travel before 9.30am, any weekday except Friday. From 2 January the equivalent will cost £75 – about 130 percent higher in real terms.

Atoc reckoned the "2009 rail fares changes" compare well with "the real costs of motoring, up by over 25 percent since 1996". Oh yeah? The Office for National Statistics says motoring costs reduced by 8 percent in real terms from 1997 to 2007; and last week it said the largest downward pressure on inflation this year came from falling transport costs, especially petrol and diesel.

Atoc also claims that fare changes will pay for investment, but ACC passengers won't get new trains for their 11 percent premium. As Atoc said, ACC is refurbishing trains to provide 35 percent more seating – ie to carry more passengers and take more revenue without paying for 35 percent more carriages.

Train firms are also spending "many millions of pounds" on stations, says Atoc, which listed three new stations opening soon. But those stations are funded mainly by taxpayers, train operators contributing little or nothing. In any case, new stations are designed to get more people on trains, netting more cash for train firms. When did Asda last raise prices to make existing customers pay for new stores?

TRANSPORT secretary Geoff Hoon's reaction to the fare rises showed that rail franchising does have one purpose to justify its phenomenal cost: shielding the government from blame.

Buffhoon said he'd asked firms to "bear in mind the difficult economic circumstances when setting their fares". He clearly didn't want the public to bear in mind that the government is demanding an 80 percent increase in fare revenue over 2007-14, refuses to impose controls on unregulated fares, still allows new restrictions on "regulated" fares and sticks with a privatisation model that bleeds cash in bureaucracy and profits.

Meanwhile the government has decreed that regulated fares (including season tickets) will rise 6 percent on average. Hayes (Kent) weekly season tickets will rise 12 percent, a year after rising 15 percent. So much for those "difficult economic circumstances".

'Dr B Ching'

ECO-GNOMICS

Pigs will fly

NEGATIVE coverage of engineering firm Arup's disastrous involvement in the non-existent Dongtan "eco-city" in Shanghai (Eyes passim) is causing alarm among the firm's senior executives, some of whom seem unaware that it is a topic best avoided.

One of Arup's "principals", Jean Rogers, recently emailed the respected business magazine *Ethical Corporation*, which has long covered the eco farce and whose Asia editor Paul French lives near the proposed site.

"It seems like you guys really hate us. Why?" whined Ms Rogers, complaining about the magazine's exposure of Arup's management of Dongtan. "Your comments are really vindictive and unwarranted… We're just a consultancy. No projects are ours – they are our clients *(sic)*… You should come and visit, and get a feel for what a sustainable engineering firm really does... Surely there are far more unethical practices and firms in the world – ones that have actually harmed people or the planet?"

Whoops! Ms Rogers probably didn't bargain for the detailed response this prompted from French. He pointed out that long after many other organisations had withdrawn from the project because it was unsustainable and ill conceived, only Arup and the Shanghai Industrial Investments Corporation (run by the local government) remained. Most of the Chinese politicians involved in the latter are now in prison or under house arrest for corruption.

Arup, he pointed out, continues to promote Dongtan as very much its project, misleading the media, British government, British embassy in China and the Foreign Office to suggest that the project is underway when it is no such thing. Indeed, only recently it was still trumpeting Dongtan plans at a sustainability conference. The company has tried to win countless contracts on the back of its "green" Dongtan credentials.

French also noted the many people who have been forced off land their families have farmed for generations, without any right to compensation, recourse or legal challenge. Many are now unemployed or forced to work long hours in low paying jobs and unable to return to their homes (which have been destroyed), their farmland or to the island where their ancestors are buried.

And it gets worse. Latest reports from Shanghai suggest the closest the Dongtan project has got to providing any public good so far was when a local farmer on nearby land started selling tickets inviting local people to watch his pigs jumping through hoops of fire.

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

LOSING BET

OH, DEAR. Not Doncaster *again?* Baffled councillors would like to know how Doncaster Bloodstock Sales (DBS), the auction house for racehorses, managed to go from paying an annual rent of £50,000-plus for its old site in the town and move to a new, prestigious site, three times the size, where it will pay just £50 a year. Oh, yes, and trouser a pay-off from the taxpayer of almost £860,000!

Doncaster council wanted to develop the old site, in Carr House Road, as part of the town's "regeneration strategy". The only way it could do so, it claims, was by paying DBS £858,500 to relinquish the lease to its three-acre site. It offered *DBS a new site, this time* of nine acres, right beside the new racecourse complex in Leger Way. It asked a one-off payment of £8,500 and rent of just £50 a year over 99 years.

Initial concerns by councillors forced an inquiry into the deal, which was negotiated in 2005. Dr Joan Rees, a former director of development at Redcar and Cleveland council, was brought in. She concluded in a report last year that everything was above board.

But councillors have now seen a private internal report from December 2006 that shows an independent valuer, apparently under the impression that it was agricultural land, put a price of only £55,320 on the new site and that the council's director of development, Peter Dale, had agreed the £858,500 pay-off with DBS before Mayor Martin Winter and his cabinet had endorsed the deal. It is also claimed that the cabinet was not told the exact rent DBS would have to pay for the new site. Since the deal was struck, the government's valuation officer has ruled the new site could command an annual rent of £250,000. Looks like another losing bet for Donny's bruised and battered taxpayers.

●FOLLOWING torrential rainstorms in July 2007 workmen from Calderdale council in Yorkshire were spotted watering hanging baskets as residents mopped up after the worst floods in years (*Eye* 1188). Not to be outdone – for they are a competitive lot in Yorkshire – contractors working for Leeds city council sallied forth on 4 December to cut grass verges... which lay under several inches of snow. One resident told the *Yorkshire Evening Post*: "It wasn't even possible to see the grass, let alone cut it." Meanwhile the icy ungritted roads and pavements on the Seacroft estate were "like glass" according to locals.

BRUM DEAL

HOW goes Birmingham city council's wizard wheeze to save millions – and make pay "fairer" – by cutting the salaries of thousands of staff *(Eyes passim)*?

Alas the scheme looks likely to end up costing the taxpayer a packet because of the expense of defending legal actions from employees who, most unreasonably, object to suffering pay cuts of up to £10,000 a year – and in a handful of cases, more.

The scheme has been hard to implement because staff have refused to fill in forms detailing their duties in protest. Of 400 who have so far had appeals heard, 324 have won and been moved to *higher* pay grades. With more than 11,000 appeals still in the system, and due to go to employment tribunals, the mess is going to cost the council thousands of hours and hundreds of thousands of pounds to untangle. It is advertising for an unspecified number of "human resources" staff on fixed-term contracts worth up to £70,000 a year each to sort out the mess.

At least Brum's director of "human resources", Andy Albon, knows who's to blame. It's all the fault of the staff, for foolishly protesting at the prospect of having their pay cut. He claims they are now seeing "the error of their ways" – despite the fact that most are winning their appeals.

●WILTSHIRE county council's children and young people's services department has a webpage called Slippery Fish where worried children can ask advice from an animated newt called Harry on subjects such as smoking, bullying and what to do if mum and dad split up. Cool!

To be directed to appropriate sources of advice, users choose from a drop-down list beginning "I am a young person who..." Options include "does not get on with school staff", "smokes", "has behaviour problems" and so on. Some options are surprising. "I am a young person who... has sex without condoms" may be all very well – but the only ages users can select are 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12. Perhaps it *is* appropriate, though. Another option for the 7-to-12s is: "I am a young person who... is pregnant or I already have children." They starts young in Wiltshire, see!

MERRY'S CHRISTMAS

AFTER our item in *Eye* 1223 about Salford city council's waste of £175,000 on a dreary propaganda sheet that nobody reads, we received a hurt letter from the Labour council's leader, John Merry.

"Contrary to your assertions," he wrote, "...the publication is well received and well read... When we've asked citizens what they think of [it] 64 per cent have said they found it good or very good for keeping them informed." Intrigued, we emailed Cllr Merry to ask exactly how many people had been asked what they thought of *LIFE IN Salford* [*sic*], what form the questions had taken, and how many had responded. Alas, despite a polite reminder, we have not received a reply.

Meanwhile the lively independent community newspaper the *Salford Star*, something of a thorn in Cllr Merry's side, which receives not a penny of taxpayers' money, has won another gong, to add to being runner-up in last year's Paul Foot awards – *viz* "best regional newspaper" in the Plain English Campaign's 2008 awards "for clarity in news and reporting". It was a welcome comeback for Salford. It had featured in the Plain English Awards before – in 1981, when a "Golden Bull" award for "the worst example of written tripe" was won by... Salford city council!

DEVON CAN WAIT

TORY East Devon district council's obsession with giving a helping hand to supermarkets against the wishes of residents is well-documented.

The *Eye* reported in 2006 (issue 1148) and again last August (1217) on plans to build a huge Wal-Mart/Asda on the beautiful River Exe estuary. Perhaps the council now feels somewhat embarrassed. How else to explain its underhand behaviour in the town of Ottery St Mary?

Back in March a well-attended public meeting was held to discuss what could be done with the site of a redundant water mill. Speakers enthused residents with talk of how community ownership, perhaps with a small hydro-power plant, could benefit the town. For some reason no one from EDDC let the meeting know that the site was already owned by Tesco – and had been since January.

In fact Churchill Property Group, the previous owner, had been in secret negotiations over the sale with EDDC for several years and had proposed building a supermarket before Tesco came on the scene. More recently, Phil Foggitt, a representative of environmental group Sustainable Ottery, had a meeting with Kate Little, head of planning at EDDC, to discuss the future of the site. During the meeting Little expressed her support for building a supermarket – but forgot to mention that Tesco already owned it. Why so bashful?

●A FORMER colleague fondly remembers a lesson in the qualities needed to get to the top from Andrea Hill (*Eyes passim*), now Suffolk county council's chief executive, in her days as deputy chief exec at North Herts district council. "Andrea scheduled a meeting with our planning policy group to coincide exactly with the 1999 solar eclipse. Everyone else was outside looking through their double sunglasses or whatever, as was the rest of the UK. We were in Attila's office. She made no mention of the eclipse, but fixed us with a steely eye as we heard gasps of awe from outside. We were all too lily-livered to complain. She stole our sunshine (or rather she stole our opportunity of seeing the moon steal it). The git." Happy days!

GUILT BY ASSOCIATION

THEY are long-term businesses that produce a steady return. Demand for their product is booming and will grow during the recession. Most of their income and capital costs are paid by the government. So why is life so tough for the housing associations?

Housing associations have raised more than £50bn in private finance over the past 20 years and none has ever gone bust or defaulted on a loan. In the process, they have taken over much former council housing and now provide 2m homes for 5m people. Yet the banks are imposing higher charges and tough new loan conditions on any association seeking new finance.

Consultants say the banks' attitude has changed completely since the collapse of Lehman Brothers in September, with any change to the circumstances of an association, such as a merger, taken as an excuse to reprice their entire loan book.

The problems for associations are compounded by a slump in sales of shared ownership properties and by big falls in interest rates. Some had used free-standing interest rate swaps to hedge against rising rates, and the recent falls have triggered sudden calls for cash or security. Perhaps most worrying of all, the new regulator for the sector, the Tenant Services Authority, has taken a leaf from John McCain's upbeat campaign manual. Its optimistic message? "The fundamentals of investment in affordable housing remain excellent."

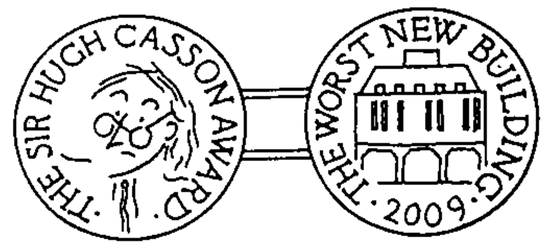
Er, really?

NUMBER CRUNCHING

2 months overdue
SAT results when they reached all pupils

6 months overdue
QCA boss Ken Boston's resignation

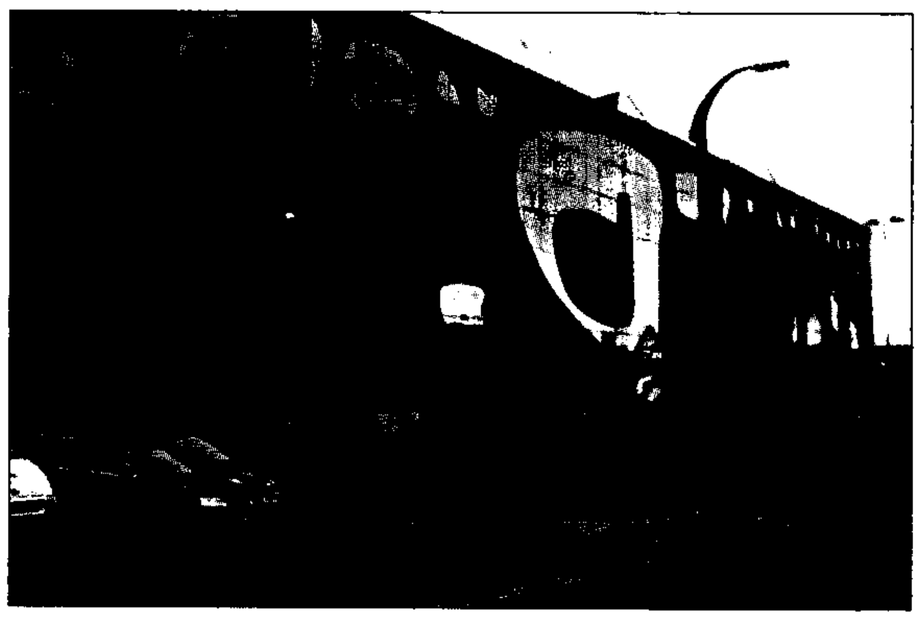
NOOKS and CORNERS



THE LARGE shed in West Bromwich fatuously called "The Public" epitomises not only the self-indulgent era which has just come to an end, but the extravagance, pretentiousness and vacuity of the New Labour years. Though it only opened in June – years late and way over budget – it is so expensive to run and pointless it may well close for good next year.

Even its purpose is hard to define: a sort of "arts and media centre" which, according to its architect, "represents a radical gesture for delivering art into the community, born from the conviction that art and architecture can be catalysts for regeneration and renewal... the building is intended to give great scope to exhibition designers, artists, educators and users of all kinds, while encouraging and challenging all users to work in innovative ways."

This radical gesture has been built with £54m (some say £61m) of public money in a deprived area of high unemployment which has no theatre, cinema or swimming pool. More than £30m of the cost has come from Arts Council England, which has been slashing or stopping smaller grants to museums, galleries and theatre companies across the country.



Much of the huge space inside the shed is occupied by art installations which are digital and interactive. As Ellis Woodman points out, writing in *Building Design* about "one of the most staggeringly misconceived projects that I have ever experienced", this sort of thing has long been superseded by developments on the internet, so leaving "The Public looking positively antique".

Woodman further notes that this avant-garde folly was the result of two other "spectacular misjudgements". One is the sheer scale of the thing, a product of the lottery-funded culture that generated so many fantastically grandiose and otiose millennium projects which rapidly failed. But the third misjudgement was that of its architect – for The Public is a product of egregious architectural pretension and conceit.

Its origins go back to 1974 when Jubilee Arts, a community arts group, was founded. With the advent of lottery funding, building a permanent home for it seemed a possibility and Rivington Street Studio worked up proposals for a modest building. But round about the time of the millennium, Will Alsop was wheeled in as architect and came up with something much more ambitious.

Alsop is the swaggering genius responsible for such masterpieces as the Peckham Library and the Palestra building in the Blackfriars Road (winner of the Casson Medal in 2006) and whose plan to regenerate Bradford consists of flooding the city centre. He likes unconventional structures on stilts and big metallic boxes, and, as he has explained: "The Public was conceived as a 'Box of Delights' offering a wide variety of spaces, forms, angles, curves, surfaces, vistas and atmospheres".

This vision has largely been realised even though Alsop left the project in 2004 when his practice went bust, leaving local architects Flannery & de la Pole to finish it, with necessary economies. Then in 2006, after massive cost overruns, Jubilee Arts went into administration and the local authority took over the project.

Externally the building is a big box, some 350ft long with no obvious entrance, whose walls of black aluminium cladding are relieved by arbitrary, pink-framed "jelly-bean" shaped windows: so very amusing. As it faces the Queen's Square shopping centre, perhaps it is appropriate that The Public resembles a large retail outlet on a trading estate, but Alsop is the sort of architect who, inspired by the writings of Robert Venturi, admires brash American commercial building and its crude symbolism. At West Bromwich, however, the box is relieved by Alsop's usual arbitrary sculptural projections, the "rock" and the "pebble", though one merely houses offices, the other toilets.

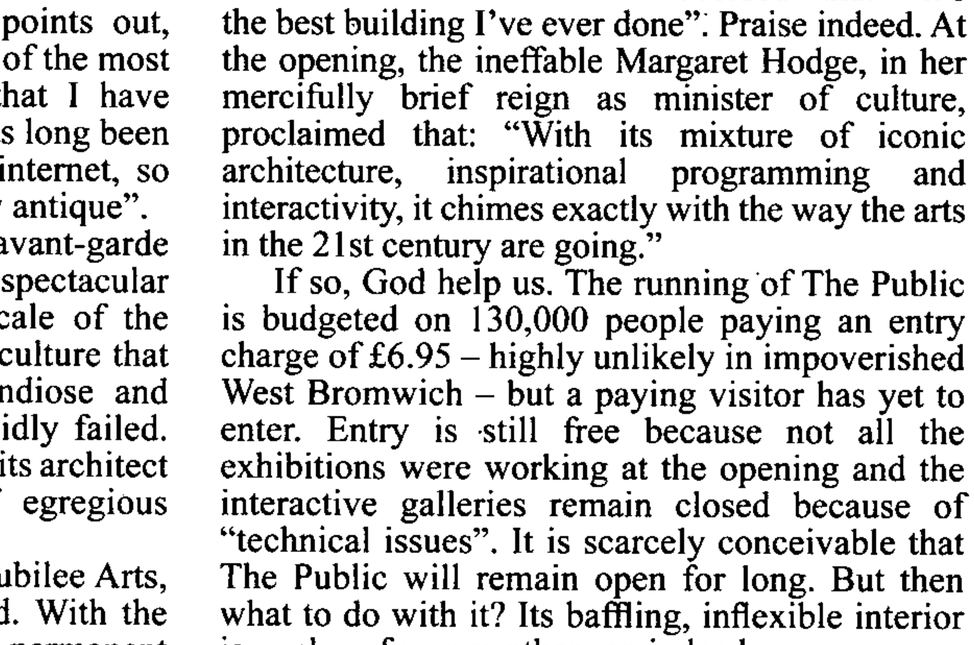
The interior is more complex, with the vast space filled with metal structures supporting galleries, ramps and "pods". At the top are "lily-pads", blobs of glass-reinforced plastic suspended from the ceiling and connected by bridges. These were intended as offices for Jubilee Arts but, since that charity's demise, are unlikely to prove attractive as lettable commercial space.

Alsop describes the interior as "like a 3D version of a Piranesi drawing" and has now decided that "it's the best building I've ever done". Praise indeed. At the opening, the ineffable Margaret Hodge, in her mercifully brief reign as minister of culture, proclaimed that: "With its mixture of iconic architecture, inspirational programming and interactivity, it chimes exactly with the way the arts in the 21st century are going."

If so, God help us. The running of The Public is budgeted on 130,000 people paying an entry charge of £6.95 – highly unlikely in impoverished West Bromwich – but a paying visitor has yet to enter. Entry is still free because not all the exhibitions were working at the opening and the interactive galleries remain closed because of "technical issues". It is scarcely conceivable that The Public will remain open for long. But then what to do with it? Its baffling, inflexible interior is useless for any other, or indeed any, purpose. That so much public money was wasted on it should be a national scandal.

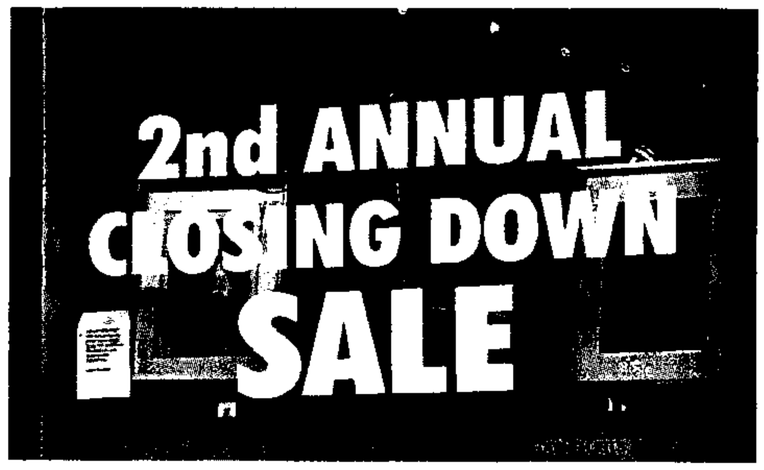
I know Alsop has won the Casson Medal once already, but there can be no more suitable candidate in 2008 than his "best building" yet.

'Piloti'



"It's amazing what pet insurance covers nowadays"

I-SPY *Berkhamsted, Herts*



Submitted by Andy Ashwell. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

IN A collapse culture where everything from Woolworths to the *Los Angeles Times* goes down, bad news is losing its ability to surprise. But there were still sharp intakes of breath last week when near-broke British newspapers began culling their arts writers, with music critics in the firing line.

Coast to coast in the US critics are falling like the Dow Jones. Now it's started here, with a swift massacre at the *Telegraph* after arts editor Sarah Crompton was told to slash her budget by half. The veteran chief music critic Geoffrey Norris was dumped; likewise the arts editor of the *Sunday Telegraph*, Peter Reed, while opera critic Rupert Christiansen had his contract reduced. No wonder Crompton is on sick leave unable to cope with the stress.

Meanwhile, the *Times* has ditched its arts correspondent, Dalya Alberge, and even that north London institution, the *Hampstead & Highgate Express*, has sent an ominous letter to all those involved with its arts supplement (a bizarre treasure with better coverage than some nationals) vaguely warning that the whole section may bite the dust.

At a recent social gathering of the Critics' Circle, its president told everyone to make the most of the evening because next year there may not be any critics left to socialise. It was a joke, but no one laughed.

CRITICS might, however, find some inspiration from America, where one of their number is fighting back.

Don Rosenberg had been chief music correspondent of the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* for 16 years but was removed from his role after a series of hostile pieces about the Cleveland Orchestra and its conductor, Franz Welser-Most. Rosenberg was replaced by someone who had been an intern on work experience, so there was almost certainly an element of cost-cutting. But the widely mooted reason was pressure from the orchestra's management and board.

Rosenberg is now suing both the paper and the orchestra – citing various grounds from age discrimination to (in the case of the orchestra) defamation and malicious interference with his career.

In its defence, the orchestra doesn't seem to be denying that it solicited Rosenberg's removal: on the contrary, it claims it had a right to hit back at him in any way available. If it wins that part of the case, it may set a legal precedent for every American musician wounded by bad notices.

Either way, it won't affect British critics (or what's left of them); but perhaps that's as well given the number who bad-mouthed Franz Welser-Most when he was in charge of the London Philharmonic Orchestra. "Frankly Worse than Most" was what they called him. Quite enough, you'd think, to justify a spot of retribution.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

Letters

Bully beef

Sir,

Your article concerning the treatment meted out to Czech President Klaus (Brussels Sprouts, Eye 1225) calls to mind similar bullying his predecessor President Hacha received at the hands of the German leadership in March 1939, when he was driven to fainting by the verbal abuse and threats made to himself and his nation.

It may be that a better comparison for the EU is not the Soviet Union but a fellow authoritarian regime of the 20th Century led by those who also desired a single European state.

Yours faithfully,
COLIN BULLEN,

Via email.

Lost in the Mail

Sir,

Loath as I am to defend the Daily Mail, and call me a pedant if you must, but you are wrong to lampoon the Daily Mail over its supposed volte face concerning the ECJ – for nothing of the sort has happened (Alzheimer's Xmas Appeal, Eye 1225).

The ruling in the Marper case concerning DNA sample retention was made by the ***European Court of Human Rights*** *and not the European Court of Justice. The latter being the highest court of the EU and the former the court of the Council of Europe, the two being completely differently organisations.*

Yours faithfully,
G. EDWARDS LL.M Eur,

Via email.

Con text is all

Sir,

You seem to have fallen into the trap set by the tabloids regarding the statement made by Martin Narey (HP Sauce, Eye 1225). In fact, a careful reading of his statement shows total consistency; what he was trying to say was that had Baby P lived, given his background and likely lack of proper parenting, he could easily have grown up to be the sort of child labelled by the tabloids as "feral" etc. This statement was part of his campaign to stop newspapers labelling socially deprived children as "animals" or "vermin". Not surprisingly, the red-tops didn't report it that way.

STEVE WILSON,

London E6.

Take that, Remote Controller

Sir,

Remote Controller remarks that the recent Take That special on ITV "could have been made by the band's record company" given it doubled up as a prime time plug for the band's new album.

Well, interestingly "Take That Come To Town" was produced by a company called Globe Productions, which is the TV division of Universal Music who happen to be, yes, you guessed it, Take That's record company.

Globe Productions is part of Universal Music's attempts to expand out of the traditional and rapidly declining CD business, and the Take That TV show is an example of what the record companies call "360 degree projects" – working with their artists on new revenue generating TV, video, live or advertising projects alongside their album releases.

The Girls Aloud TV special is also made by Universal, and, Remote Controller will surely be pleased to hear, we can expect many more such projects in the coming years.

And maybe not just on ITV. Universal has just hired a certain Lesley Douglas to help expand its fledgling TV division and I hear she's quite well connected at the BBC.

Yours,
CHRIS COOKE,

Editor, CMU Daily.

Jersey cream

Sir,

In Rotten Boroughs ("Smart Alec", Eye 1224) you note that "H&K is owned by the US media/ PR conglomerate WPP". Shame. WPP is of course, WPP Group plc, an English company. Or at least it was until it introduced a new Jersey-based parent company (tax domiciled in Ireland) in November in order "to protect [its] taxation position, and provide the opportunity to reduce the overall tax rate".

Regards,
JAMES ASHWORTH,

Via email.

Museum piece

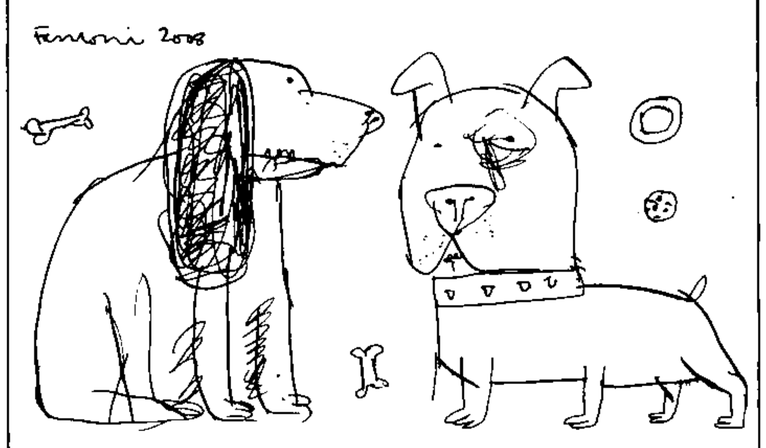
Sir,

Piloti, in his onslaught on Zaha Hadid's plans for Hoxton Square (Nooks and Corners, Eye 1225), it is wrong to claim that she designed a building for the Design Museum in Southwark. That would be the Architecture Foundation's unbuilt home that he was thinking about. However, we would have been delighted if it had been for us.

Sincerely,
DEYAN SUDJIC,

Director of the Design Museum, London SE1.

Scenes You Seldom See



"I was last year's Christmas present – and I'm still here"

Web of deceit

Sir,

Martin Edwards (Eye 1224) may well revere BBC News 24 for the "inestimable boon of never having to watch adverts". Lucky him.

I am currently living in Germany. Despite the fact that I have a TV licence at home which will be valid for the entire year that I am away, I find that I am not allowed to view a simple little news clip from the BBC's website. To add insult to injury, clicking on the promised video results in a 30-second advert which the unsuspecting viewer sits through before realising that - er - that's it. No news clip. Congratulations, you've just been done.

Such an ethical organisation.

Yours,
TERRY MAYER,

Berlin.

Doesn't add up

Sir,

Re "A Lamey excuse" (In the Back, Eye 1224). We are told that out of 102 Companies, 40 pay their tax, 40 sometimes don't and 16 often don't. What happened to the other six? Perhaps the government pays them?

MATHS NERD,

Via email.

● *Taxman replies: The number of "non-avoiders" should have been 46, not 40. Sorry. That 55% of 102 large companies surveyed avoided tax either "opportunistically" or "serially" is still correct, however.*

Glenda Slagg

Sir,

Can I just say how appalling your Glenda Slagg columns are.

Each issue I find them idiotic, boring and NOT FUNNY IN ANY WAY AT ALL.

Please stop them as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,
SIMON ZEC,

Via email.

Sir,

Can I just commend you on your Glenda Slagg column in each issue of your splendid magazine?

I find them witty, intelligent and a work of absolute genius.

Thanks so much for improving my life with such inspired satire.

Yours sincerely,
SIMON ZEC,

Via email.

HUSBAND

Tours will also take place offering the chance to view the office space available for rent to new and exiting businesses.

Advertisement for OrbisEnergy

Lookalikes

Sir,

I enjoyed (as always) the cover of Eye 1225 ("Speaker In Mace Drama").

I can only assume that there was some arcane legal reason why you were unable to use pictures of the real Speaker and Serjeant-at-Arms. Luckily, it was an inspired choice to use photos of Roy Kinnear and Parker, Lady Penelope's butler from Thunderbirds.

Regards,
DAVID ADAMS,

Via email.

Keeping score

Sir,

Re the Apgar score (Medicine Balls, Eye 1225). It is a compliment to Dr Virginia Apgar, physician and anaesthetist (1909-1974) that her method of measuring the well-being of a new-born baby is now so universal that young doctors only know it by an acronym (for "Activity, Pulse, Grimace, Appearance and Respiration"). But remember Dr Apgar too!

DR JOHN DAVIES,

Haverbreaks, Lancaster.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"When we play at home in the Champions League the fans do expect at least three points."
SHAUN MOLONEY, Sky Sports News
(P. Murphy)

"... and the Celtic supporters, holding their heads in their faces..."
DAVID BEGG, BBC Radio Scotland
(Nicola Cecil)

"Gritters will be working around the clock for the next few hours."
BBC Scotland News
(Peter Curran)

"I think savers have got the short end of the stick..."
LYNNE FEATHERSTONE MP, BBC Radio 4
(Ed Knight)

"If you gave those [free kicks] all the time, you'd be giving them constantly."
PETER CROUCH, Sky Sports News
(Julie M. Smith)

Pedantry Corner

... In Eco-Gnomics (Eye 1225) you describe the error made by PSCA as "a clanger".

Not so. In the early days of target shooting the target was an iron plate which, when hit by the low velocity lead bullets of the time, gave an audible clang

An accurate shot was "a clanger" (and if the shooter missed he had "dropped a clanger"). Your error should now be evident.

K. BAXBY.

... In your last edition of "The Broonites (Eye 1225), the cake labelled "Dundee" (from which a file was being extracted) had the shape of a Victoria sponge and the crustiness of a pie. No more cake related madness please.

Yours exceedingly angrily,
KIP LING (MR).

... OMG. Even your mighty organ is doing it. I refer, of course, to the following phrase from TV Eye (PE 1224): "Thousands of miles from the 'Strictly Come Sergeant' epicenter... ".

It's not the American spelling I object to: I'm used to that by now. But, living as I do not thousands of miles from a major earthquake zone and in daily expectation of The Big One (nothing to do with your mighty organ, I may add), I confess I am fed up with "epicentre" being used as if it meant "exact, absolute centre", when it means "point on the Earth's surface directly above the focus of an earthquake".

Yours seismically,
CATHERINE ATHERTON.

*... I enjoyed your comment on killer ants (Private Eye 1225). However, as your Entomological Staff will know, the name Ant Andec should be published as **Ant andec**.*

JOHN KERSHAW.

Pseudo names

... Frankly, we would have thought at this time of year that people should be in church rather than writing time-wasting and silly letters.

FATHER CHRIS MASS, CAROL SERVICE AND MISS L. TOE.

... Please stop printing letters that are from people with made-up names that are really football teams.

Just print letters from people with real names.

MR REAL, Madrid.

... We can all enjoy a made-up name, but plundering the annals of Prog Rock (Letters, 1223) is a joke too far.

These people will start sneaking in the names of their favourite albums at every opportunity.

Surely Punk's cleansing fire was meant to save us from that?

CELINE ENGLAND-BEITHERPOUND.

... So why shouldn't I change my identity to confuse the rozzers?

DAME IAN GREEN.

... I am very grateful to your organ and the numerous attempts by your readers to cheer me up during the winter months. Unfortunately, it hasn't worked.

SARAH TONIN.

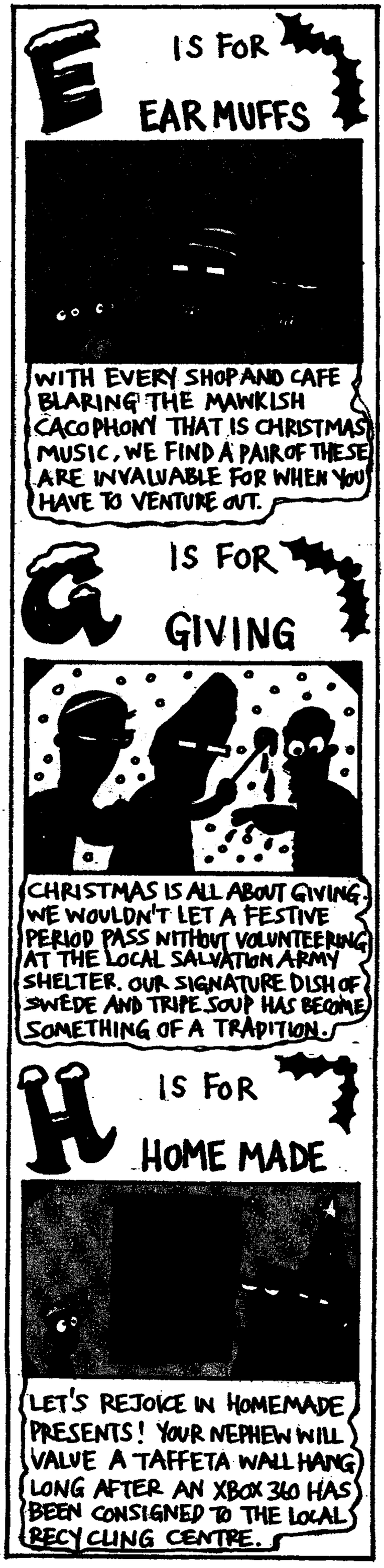
... We'd just like to say how much we've enjoyed the entries in this section.

Wishing you all the best for the festive season.

MEL E. CHRISTMAS
& A.R.P. NEWYEAR.

GRIM UP NORTH LONDON XMAS GLOSSARY

by KNIFE & PACKER


E IS FOR EAR MUFFS
WITH EVERY SHOP AND CAFE BLARING THE MAWKISH CACOPHONY THAT IS CHRISTMAS MUSIC, WE FIND A PAIR OF THESE ARE INVALUABLE FOR WHEN YOU HAVE TO VENTURE OUT.
G IS FOR GIVING
CHRISTMAS IS ALL ABOUT GIVING. WE WOULDN'T LET A FESTIVE PERIOD PASS WITHOUT VOLUNTEERING AT THE LOCAL SALVATION ARMY SHELTER. OUR SIGNATURE DISH OF SWEDE AND TRIPE SOUP HAS BECOME SOMETHING OF A TRADITION.
H IS FOR HOME MADE
LET'S REJOICE IN HOMEMADE PRESENTS! YOUR NEPHEW WILL VALUE A TAFFETA WALL HANG LONG AFTER AN XBOX 360 HAS BEEN CONSIGNED TO THE LOCAL RECYCLING CENTRE.

NEWS FROM SARK

The Quibbling Siblings

HAS the island of Sark condemned itself to penury by rejecting candidates approved by Sir David and Sir Frederick Barclay in the recent election for Chief Pleas, its assembly? You might think so by reading the newspapers, particularly those belonging to Sir David and Sir Frederick Barclay.

From their naff faux-castle on Brecqhou, offshore from Sark, the weirdo twins have long campaigned for an end to feudalism, posing as champions of democracy. They got their way on 10 December with the first general election for Chief Pleas – only to throw their toys out of the pram when they discovered that the serfs had not voted for the Barclays' stooges. "Many people on the island realise that they have shot themselves in the foot with this election result," an unnamed source close to the fraternal fruitcakes told the *Daily Telegraph*, which they own. "All the Barclays want to do is to try to get rid of the feudal regime."

Hm. In recent years the touchy tycoons have been buying up freeholds in Sark (*Eye* 1197), preparing for the happy day when they could take full control of the island. They took over three of the island's six hotels as well as the main building firms, and financed a newsletter called *Sark News*. "You couldn't talk in public about the Barclays," says a resident. "All of a sudden you wouldn't have a builder or a plumber, and you'd be given a character-assassination in *Sark News*."

With their political ambitions thwarted, they suddenly closed down their businesses and sacked the staff. But why behave so vindictively if their only aim, ending the feudal system, had been achieved? "What they wanted was control of Chief Pleas," another islander told the *Eye*. "It's an attempted *coup*, with the chequebook rather than the gun."

Despite their abrupt and vicious revenge, the Barclays' lawyer told the *Telegraph* that "the door remains open" for the island's authorities. What concession would be needed to melt their tender hearts? The *Telegraph* didn't say, but the *Eye* is happy to oblige. If their chief henchman Kevin Delaney, who had been roundly defeated in the election, were co-opted as a member of Chief Pleas, or at least its general purposes committee, they'd be happy to get out the chequebook again.

And what a chequebook! The twins, it was widely reported, have invested £5m a year in Sark and created umpteen new jobs. Really? "They keep talking about this £5m investment, but I don't know where it is," a very senior official on Sark tells the *Eye*. "They've been a drain on our exchequer, actually, because they're always hiring lawyers." Five years ago, for instance, the benevolent billionaires donated £200,000 to the building of Sark's new school and community centre; a few months ago, in another tantrum, they sued the hall's trustees for the return of the money, plus interest and legal costs (see *Eye* 1214). Judgment in that case is due on 28 January.

The Barclays may have spent millions buying up one fifth of the island's freeholds, but as another islander points out: "If you take over a business that employs 50 people you can't say you've created 50 jobs. All that happened was that some islanders suddenly found themselves employed by the Barclays."

Or unemployed, as it now seems. The *Telegraph* reported last week that "around 140 workers" – a quarter of the island's population – had been laid off by the brothers after the election. In fact most were itinerant labourers from Slovakia or France, who have since gone home. Only 38 Sark residents were dismissed, of whom 13 had found other jobs within four days.

The Barclays underestimated the islanders' resilience, which kept spirits high even during the Nazi occupation of 1940-45 under the legendary Dame of Sark, Sibyl Hathaway. "We survived until the Barclays came," Dame Sibyl's grandson, Michael Beaumont, tells the *Eye*, "and we'll survive if they leave." He pauses. "But I'm afraid they'll be back."

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

"We don't know exactly what chemicals these women are using," Fred Enanga of the Criminal Investigations Directorate told reporters in Kampala, "but they are highly effective. We suspect one of the substances might be chloroform, but we don't know where they get their supply. That is something our investigations must crack. What we do know is that the women apply the chemicals to their nipples, then go into bars to pick up men. When the man wakes up next morning in his hotel room, he finds he's been stripped naked and left penniless. And the last thing he can remember is commencing the act of romance."

Enanga was issuing a warning to travelling businessmen in Uganda, after robbers began using women smeared with soporific chemicals to knock their victims unconscious. "Several

types of heavy sedative have been used in these nipple drugging robberies. The women target wealthy men in bars, and go back to their hotel room. Usually, the man remembers removing her top, but nothing more. Then the robbers move in and take everything the man has, even his clothes. We first came across this practice last year, when we apprehended a thief called Juliana Mukasa, who confessed everything to us. I advise all men to take caution, but particularly businessmen who carry a lot of cash. It's a serious situation, and people have to be aware." *(Independent [Zambia], 28/11/08. Spotter: Adam Plowright)*

– o –

"*This is not a marketing trick," Wolfgang Gutberlet of the Kurhessische Flesichwaren meat company told reporters in a curing cellar in Fulda, "my sole intention is to improve the quality of our produce. I believe that everything is influenced by sound. Classical music has a positive effect on the maturation process, something I learned at the Staatlicher Hofkeller wine estate in Wurzburg, where a violinist plays to the vines each day. So two years ago, I decided to hire a string quartet to play Mozart and Bach here in the cellar, to improve the curing process. Eine Kleine Nachtmusik for the sausage, Die Kunst der Fuge for the hams.*

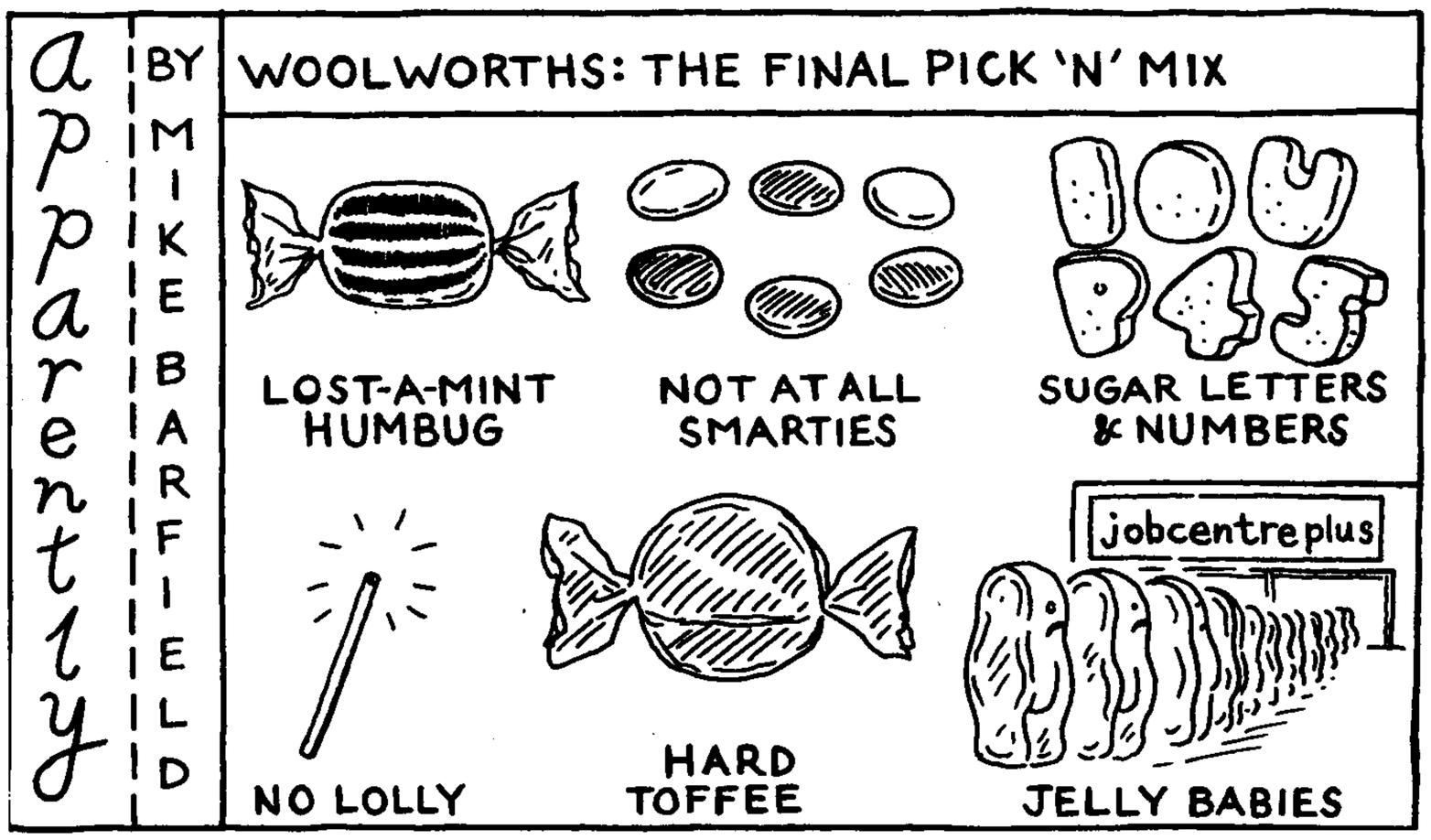
"Because of health regulations, the quartet all wear white hats and coats when they play, to ensure that everything is hygienic. There is no audience, just the meat. They play here twice a month, and the beneficial effect on the meat has been undeniable. I'd never play rock or techno music to my hams, because they are too delicate for such rough sounds. And I'd never use canned music. Only live performance has this beneficial effect."

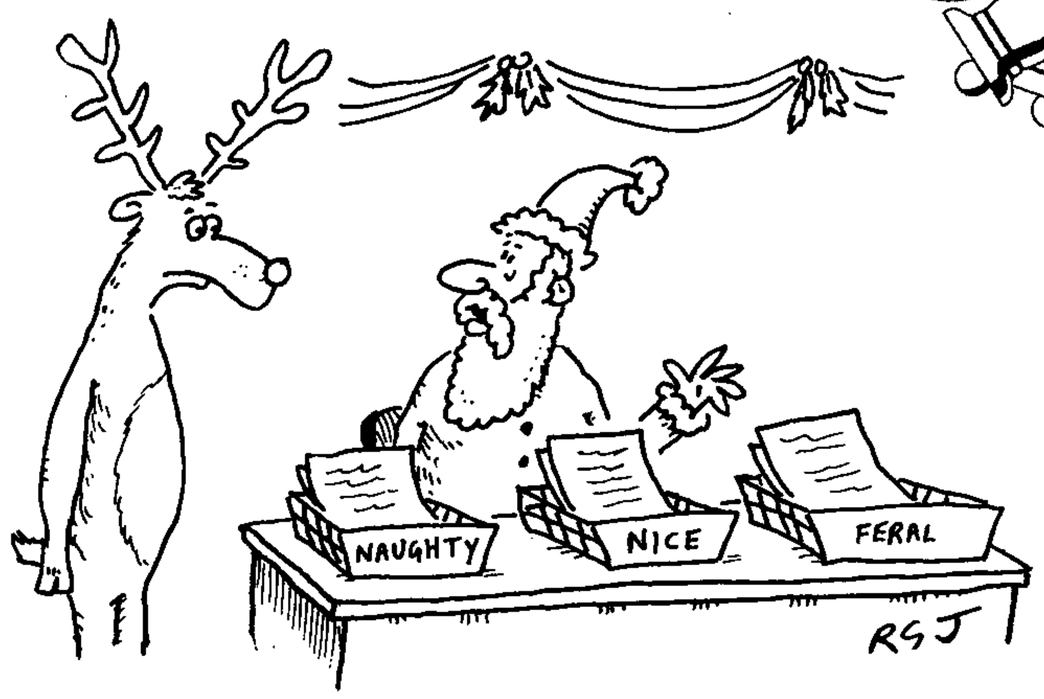
Professor Franconia Kulmbach of the Max Rubner Institute observed that "there is no scientific explanation for what Gutberlet is doing. But it is theoretically possible that sound vibrations might trigger chemical processes, and his meats are undeniably excellent. Especially his salami." (Hessische/Niedersachsische Allgemeine, 6/9/08. Spotter: Simon Anstey)

– o –

"Scientists have known for years that the act of peeling a strip of Scotch tape off its reel generates subatomic particles," Juan Escobar told a press conference at the University of California in Los Angeles, "but until now we didn't know that it can also emit X rays. If you do it in a vacuum chamber, lots and lots of X rays are emitted, enough to take a picture of your finger. It's very exciting, and a little bit scary.

"Whenever you put two surfaces in contact with each other, they become charged. And if you separate them quickly enough, those charges are still there, and that generates an electronic field between them. These charges really want to jump to the other side of the tape, and when they do, they emit X rays. At the moment, this discovery is just a novelty, but who knows? In developing countries and rural areas, where electricity is expensive, the process might be adapted for making cheap X-ray machines. The power you can get from peeling a roll of tape is enormous." *(NPR News (US), 25/10/08. Spotter: Brendan Joseph O'Byrne)*

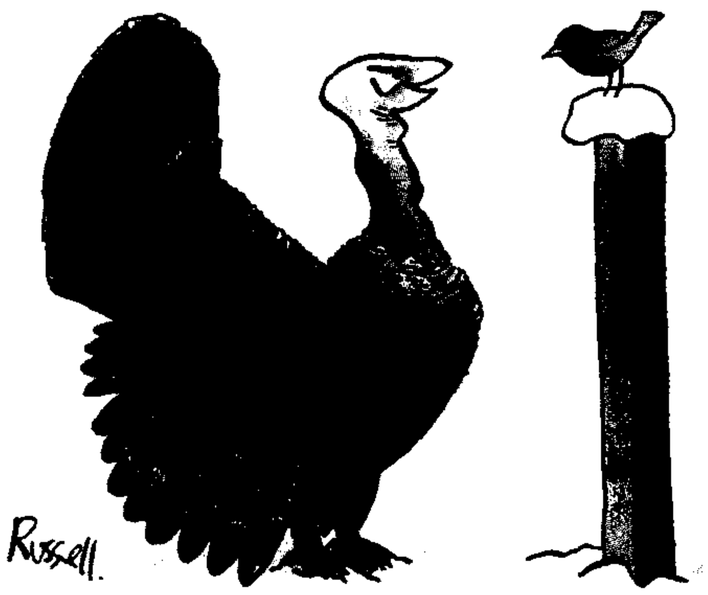




"We've introduced an extra category for modern kids"

"Wow! A satsuma!"

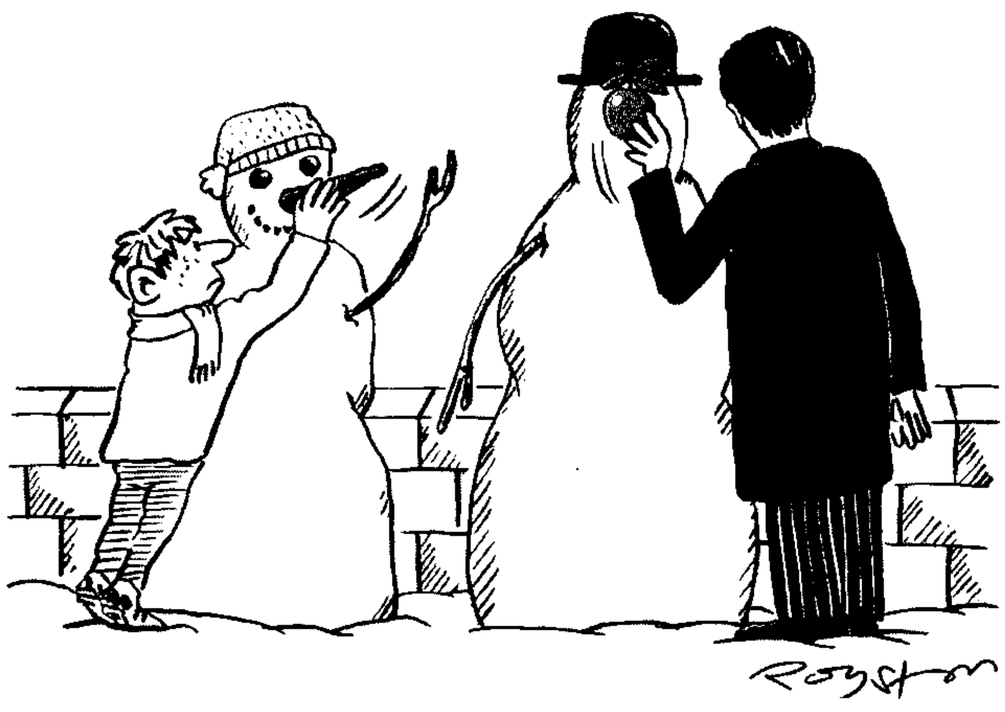
"Yah, we're just renting until the market bottoms out""



"Fancy some work experience? Job-swap?"

"I suppose I'd be about five or six when I saw Mommy kissing Santa Claus"

"They're not to hang up, they're your presents, it's all we can afford!"



PRIME MINISTERIAL DECREE NO. 34

From the Desk of the Supreme Leader

Comrades,

May I wish you seasonal greetings at the end of a glorious year of achievement.

As we look back on 2008, we see an unparalleled catalogue of successes.

Let me remind you all of some of the highlights of what historians will doubtless hail as my annus mirabilis.

1. **MY SAVING OF THE WORLD** When American-inspired financial meltdown threatened to overwhelm the world economy, it was your ever-vigilant leader who alone came up with the policy of neo-Keynesian Brownite bail-outism.

This was greeted with admiration by all the other world leaders, who queued up to praise my far-sighted foresight and unparalleled economic acumen.

Only our German colleagues saw fit to carp in their narrow nationalist neo-Fascist manner, shamefully reminiscent of a period of history we choose not to mention, though older Comrades will remember when poor, hard-working Germans with families to support were forced to take wheelbarrows full of worthless Marks through the streets before invading all the other countries in Europe.

Let Comrade Merkel remember those dark days before she castigates my prudent policy of borrowing £1 trillion in the hope that things will get better.

2. **MY VICTORY IN IRAQ** As I recently saw at first hand, our heroic soldiers have achieved everything we set out to do in Iraq, without even having to venture outside Basra airport. We have thus been able to fulfil our promise of handing over to the local government (the Americans) in time for our brave troops to be brought home to Afghanistan.

3. **MY SUCCESS IN AFGHANISTAN** As I was recently privileged to witness at first hand, our heroic soldiers have written another glorious chapter in the long history of the British in Afghanistan. Thanks to their efforts, the Taliban have been contained within a tiny 90 percent of the country, and the cultivation of their much-needed export crop of poppy seeds is at a record high. And the women of Afghanistan are once again free to participate in their traditional ceremonies of being stoned to death for not wearing the burqa. No mean achievement, I think Comrades will agree.

4. **THE TOTAL OVERTHROW OF NEO-OSBORNIST CAMERONISM** There is no greater tribute to my leadership than the complete collapse of any popular support for the Bullingdonian claque and their decadent Carphoneist associates. There was a time when some Comrades were duped by their seemingly plausible policies of agreeing with everything the Supreme Leader did.

But now they can be exposed in their true colours as a mangy crew of verminous jackals, feeding off the rotting carcass of the British economy (not that it is in any way a carcass or rotting, thanks to my saving of the world, see Point 1 above).

No wonder that, as your Supreme Leader basks modestly in the acclamations of his people and the entire world, the former discredited leader, the hated ex-Comrade Blair, has finally been consigned to the dustbin of history (which is now only to be collected on alternate Wednesdays).

Signed

Gordon Brown

The Supreme Lender

A Seasonal Message from Comrade Lord Mandelson, Honorary Deputy Supreme Leader and Trade Minister

At this time of year it is customary for comrades to celebrate the coming of the Saviour of the World.

So let us all join together in praising our Supreme Leader, Comrade Brown. Please send him a Christmas card at once! You know where **he** lives, and I know where **you** live!

Yours,

Comrade Lord Mandelson.

Dave Snooty AND HIS PALS

I'M COMPLETELY STUFFED!
I HATE BRUSSELS!
KEEP QUIET ABOUT IT FOR GOD'S SAKE!
IS THAT CRANBERRY, DAMIAN OLD BEAN?
I NEVER REVEAL MY SAUCES, EH READERS? LEEKS ANYONE?
NONSENSE DAVE - YOU'VE STILL GOT A CHANCE!
THIS IS A FEEBLE JOKE - I MUST USE IT AT QUESTION TIME!
HERE'S SOME MISTLETOE - LET'S KISS OUR ELECTION CHANCES GOODBYE!
OH DEAR - I'VE FOUND SOME ROUBLES IN THE PUDDING!
LET'S PLAY CHARADES - WE'RE IN POWER AND I'M THE PM!
I WISH...I WISH I WAS DULL, MOODY AND INEPT...
...THEN I'D BE IN NUMBER 10!

Cameron Christmas Card Arouses Controversy

HAPPY XMAS FROM DAVE 'N' SAM!

IN A break with tradition, the Conservative leader has chosen for his card this year a happy and informal portrait of himself and wife Samantha relaxing with someone who he hoped would give his party a lot of money but turned out to have been "up to no good", according to a party spokesman.

Some Tories have commended Mr Cameron for the compassion he has shown in befriending David Ross, a controversial businessman, and his charming young niece.

But others have described his card as "exploitative" and "tacky" – nothing more than a bid to win cheap popularity by putting a pretty girl on his card to appeal to male *Sun* readers in the C1-D2 bracket.

What do you think of Dave Cameron's Christmas card? Do you think:

(a) this is the most appropriate way to mark the birth of our Saviour?

(b) David Ross should go to prison?

(c) Phew, what a scorcher?

Phone now on 0890 2641264 (lines closed. Terms and conditions apply).

IT'S THE XMAS FACTOR!

GOVERNMENT 'DEFENDS FIGURES'

THE HOME Secretary Jacqui Smith has admitted that figures released by the Home Office which show a fall in the number of knife attacks on her by the government's chief statistician Sir Michael Scholar were perhaps misleading.

"While it's true to say that Sir Michael has knifed me in the back 100 percent more times than the figures claimed, the figures are still broadly representative of figures broadly representing figures which suggest that figures can be broadly represented in the broadest sense," said Ms Smith. "One thing we can all agree on is that statistics don't lie."

Jacqui Smith is a 32AA (according to the recently released Home Office statistics).

From The Message Boards

Members of the online community respond to the major issues of the day...

Home Secretary curbs council bin snoopers

"Jacqui" Smith abdicates responsibility for bins. The same day a headless body is found in a bin. New Labour in a nutshell. – ***Brown_out***

it give's cart branch 2 any mugger or pedo to hide in a bin ● its like the pedo in eastender's. the police warnd the acter, be careful in case the public attack u ● ● "BUT" y do'nt they protect the public an arest him? – ***Eye_4_an_eye***

Agree 1000 persent ● now perv's in prison make crismas card's and they r sold to innosent shopper's in shop's!!!! ● – ***Broken_Britan***

I read about this too. Apparently the cards appear completely normal, so there is no way of knowing if these dangerous prisoners were involved. As a mother I decided to burn all my Christmas cards. Better safe than sorry. – ***Emily***

Victory in Europe for imperial measures

Why should I use miles, pints, etc, just because some unelected busybody in Brussels tells me to? – ***Metric_Martyr***

plese remember kilo the ships cat from hms belfast. it was in the paper's he was kill-ed by yob's but they was not metric marter's just mindless yob's, they probly would of done it if kilo was called pound or ounce. they was found gilty but the punishmant never fit's the crime. plese visit my facebook page an sign my partition for more justice for kilo. ps my name is karen but i am not like karen matthew's i love my kid's. not all us karen's r bad – ***Caring_Karen***

god bless karen. kilo rip in heven with baby p – ***Justice_4_Maddie***

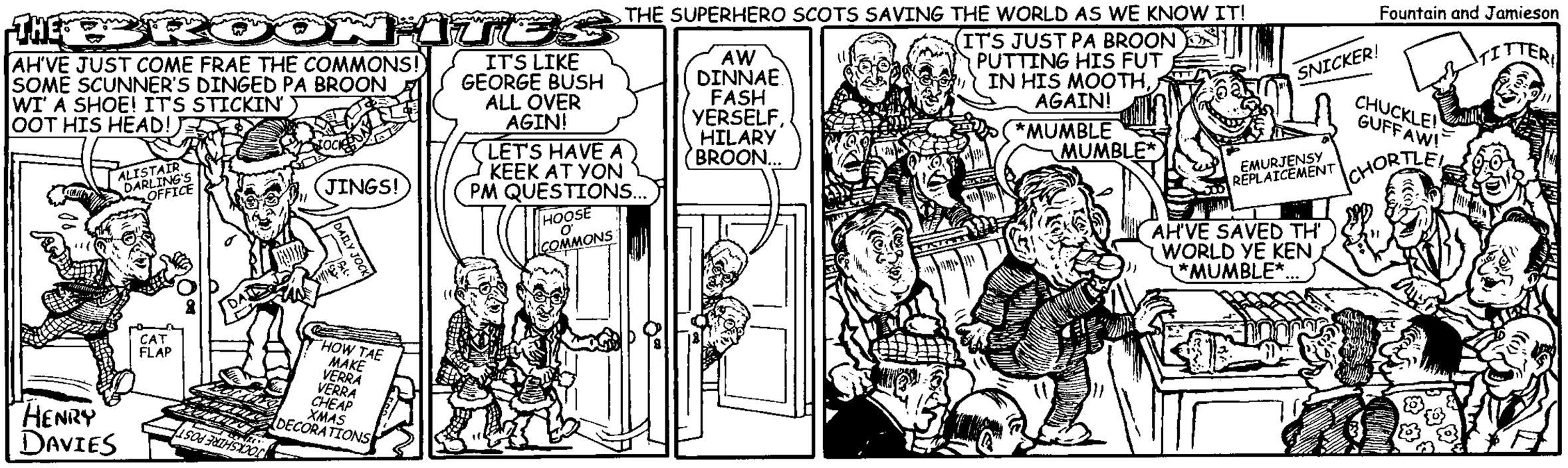
Wonderful news! Now I can eat my Murray Mints by the POUND! And to raise money for Andy, the British economy and other good causes, I am making some special seasonal "Mints Pies"! – ***Murray_Maniac***

wat do u mean wonderful news u scumbag i hope u die at crismas ● ● ● – ***Justice_4_Maddie***

THE BROONITES

THE SUPERHERO SCOTS SAVING THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT!

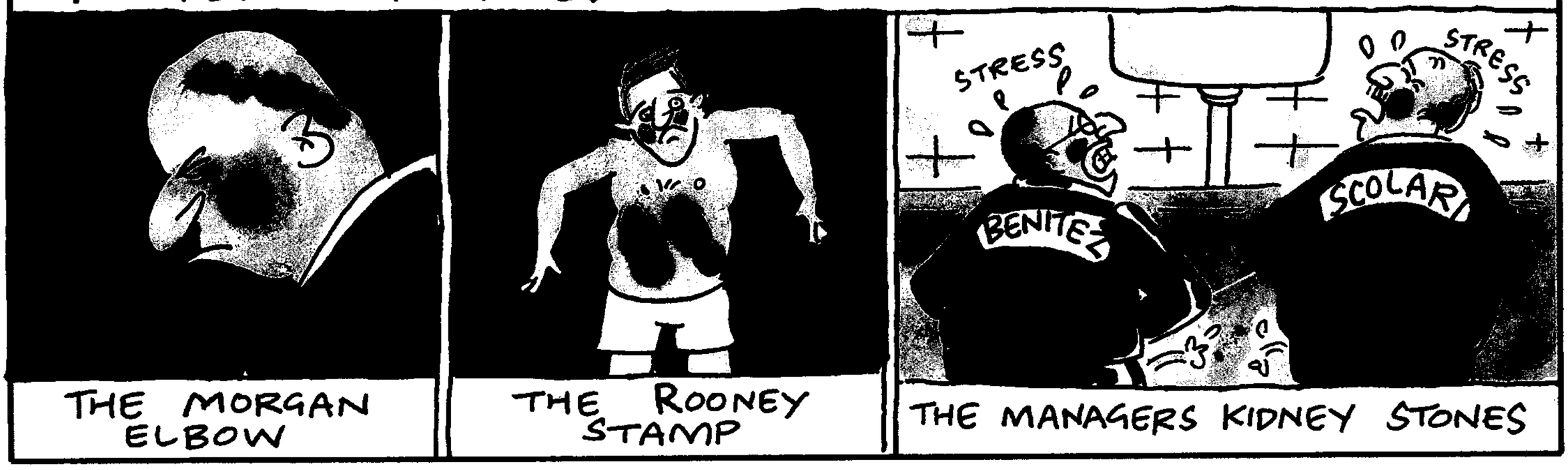
Fountain and Jamieson


AH'VE JUST COME FRAE THE COMMONS! SOME SCUNNER'S DINGED PA BROON WI' A SHOE! IT'S STICKIN' OOT HIS HEAD!
ALISTAIR DARLING'S OFFICE
JOCK
JINGS!
DAILY JOCK
CAT FLAP
HOW TAE MAKE VERRA VERRA CHEAP XMAS DECORATIONS
HENRY DAVIES
IT'S LIKE GEORGE BUSH ALL OVER AGIN!
LET'S HAVE A KEEK AT YON PM QUESTIONS...
HOOSE O' COMMONS
AW DINNAE FASH YERSELF, HILARY BROON...
IT'S JUST PA BROON PUTTING HIS FUT IN HIS MOOTH, AGAIN!
MUMBLE MUMBLE
SNICKER!
TITTER!
CHUCKLE! GUFFAW!
CHORTLE!
EMURJENSY REPLAICEMENT
AH'VE SAVED TH' WORLD YE KEN *MUMBLE*...

the PREMIERSH*TS

PAUL WOOD

FOOTBALL RELATED INJURIES — AN UPDATE...



Celeb

LIGGER

I REALLY LIKE THIS TRADITION OF YOU AND ME POPPING INTO THE VILLAGE PUB ON CHRISTMAS EVE, DAD...
WELL THE VILLAGE PUB IS AN ENDANGERED SPECIES.
SO WE SHOULD DO ALL WE CAN TO SUPPORT IT. PLUS IT'S GOOD TO SPEND A BIT OF TIME RELAXING WITH THE LOCALS...
CHEERS
CAN I INTEREST YOU TWO IN A CHRISTMAS DRAW?
YEAH, WHY NOT? GOODWILL AND ALL THAT...
THANKS FOR THIS.
HAPPY CHRISTMAS!
DRAW
DRAW

BY BIRCH

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

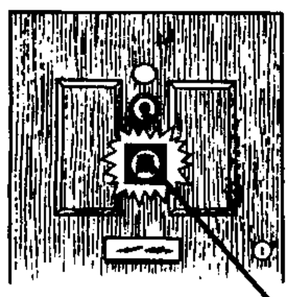
Damien's no ogre—look at all this publicity!
HIRST SUES SCHOOLBOY FOR USING DIAMOND SKULL IMAGE IN COLLAGE.
WORLD'S RICHEST ARTIST DEMANDS MONEY FROM 16 YEAR OLD CARTAIN.
Exactly!
He's just giving the kid a helping hand...
He's all heart.
HIRST SU
FOR
DIA

GNOME'S THRIFT

XMAS NOVELTY

HOUSE OF COMMONS SPEAKER

Simply connect the Speaker to the bell outside your front door – and as soon as someone rings it – *Hey Presto!* – Speaker says "Come in whoever you are and ransack the bedroom. And don't worry about a warrant!"



Colours:
Damian Green,
Gordon Brown,
and Black Rod

Price £999.99

Fly killers!

Say goodbye to silent swatting misery with the MUSICAL FLY SWAT

New from Zambia, this must-have breakthrough in Aerial Insect Termination actually Plays As It Swats! Incredible!

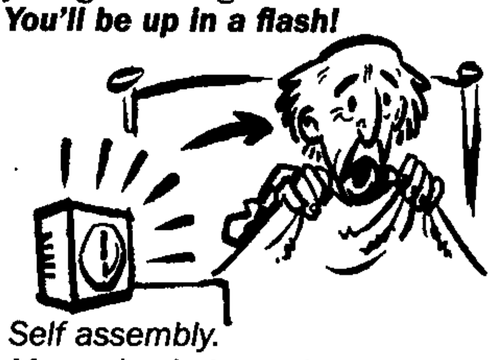
Choice of tunes
1. Fly Me To The Moon
2. Flight Of The Bumblebee
3. Flying Dutchman (Extracts)

Price £1.95
(Pack of three. Fly not included)

Novelty Alarm Clock Bargain

'WAKEY WOOKY'

Looks like an ordinary alarm clock but instead of a bell you'll hear the real-life voice of Russell Brand letting you know he's slept with your granddaughter!
You'll be up in a flash!



Self assembly.
Money back guarantee.
£35.99 Batteries not included

SENIOR CITIZENS!

No need to feel embarrassed when talking to yourself thanks to ***Phone-Y-Phone***™

Looks just like the latest mobile!
Young people will think you are having a conversation with a loved one – when in fact you're just voicing your thoughts out loud. No more fear of ridicule for you with your amazing Phone-Y-Phone!

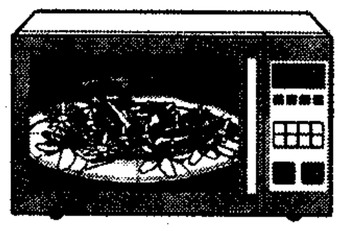
PRICE *£93.99 per month includes 160 FREE phoney text messages.*

Choice of Ringtones: One Foot In The Grave, Dad's Army, Grandad

Introducing

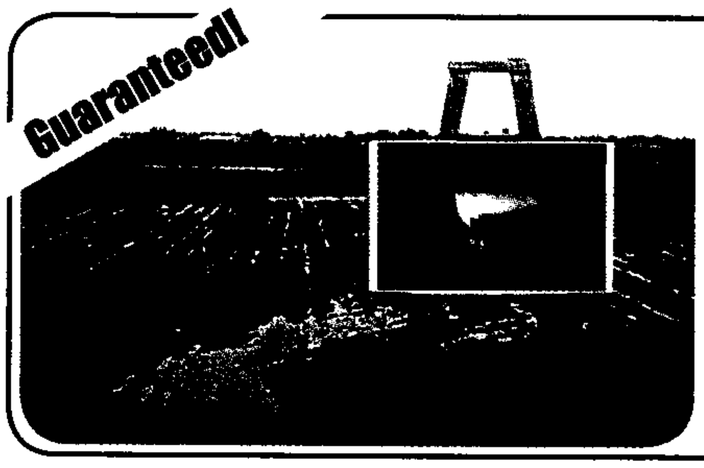
HOMEO-PIZZA

The Alternative Medical Pizza from Austria – the only Pizza that allows you to eat yourself well! Just pop Homeo-Pizza in the microwave and Ping! *You've never felt better!*



Toppings include: Arnica and Aloe Vera, St Johns Wort and Verbena, Nettle and Nux Vomica

For the treatment of Leukaemia, Alzheimers, heart disease, chronic arthritis and nappy rash.
Price: 99p per multipack of six pizzas



SEE THE

NORTHERN LIGHTS

At the Gnome 'Lapland-style' Theme Park just off Junction 12 of the M25. *Only £50*
(Entrance up a muddy track into a muddy field. Please shut the gate behind you.)

An end to lost-glasses misery with

SPEC NAV

At last a 100% reliable spectacle retrieval system that pinpoints exactly where you last left your spectacles and directs you to where they are.*

Price £399.99
Plays theme tune from TV's Wallander

*You may need spectacles to read the SpecNav screen

FLAT SCREEN FISH TANK

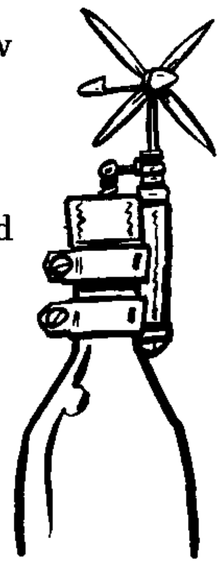
No more bulky-aquarium blues with the fabulous 72" Flat Screen Fish Tank, new from Malaysia. Fits flush onto your wall and guarantees hours of piscine viewing pleasure!

Plays Theme Tune From TV's One Show
Price £1.742 (plus fish)

New from Holland

The Wind-Powered CORKSCREW

THE FIRST eco-friendly corkscrew that harnesses natural energy to open your wine bottle. Simply fix the Wind-Powered Corkscrew onto the neck of the bottle – *et voila*! – wine's ready to pour.



Price: £7,642.78 (wind not included)

FAIR TRADE HEROIN™

Do you care about where your narcotic drugs come from? Do you want your smack to be ethically sourced?

Says TV's Pete Doherty *"Er, who am I?"*

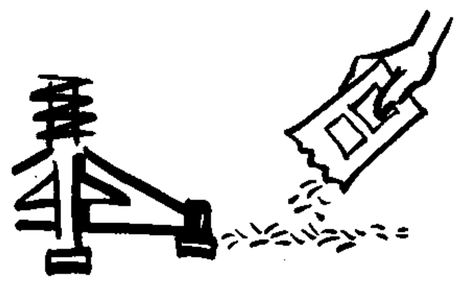
Good for you! Now available in the UK, Fairtrade Heroin for the first time comes **only** from our monitored and regulated poppy farmers who conform to the highest standards of intensive Class A substance production. *Shoot up with a clean conscience!*

Price £2 million per bag

Fake Christmas Tree Lovers!

Don't be embarrassed just because your Christmas tree is made of plastic!

NOODLES OF NEEDLES



Yes! These authentic-looking Xmas tree needles come in a handy sachet ready to sprinkle around your tree.

Now your friends will believe you too can afford a REAL NEW TREE!

And you can use them year after year after year!

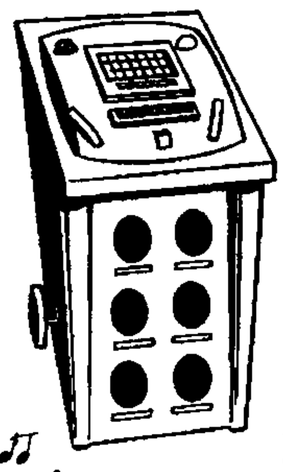
Price: Packet of 100 25p (+ p&p).

At last!

WHEEL-O-SMART

THE WHEELIE BIN WITH A BRAIN!

- Artificial Intelligence Technologists at L'Institut de la Poubelle, Limoges have found the answer to all your wheelie worries. Now the Wheel-o-Smart
- Sorts your refuse into the correct categories.
- Locks wheels to prevent incorrect egress on non-approved days.
- Ensures zero-overspill and compliant lid closure.
- Guarantees correct on-pavement positioning.



Plays the theme tune from 'Quantum of Solace'

PRICE £5.99

MAS GIFTMAR

50%* off!

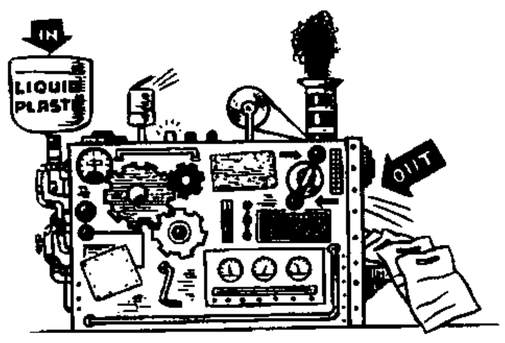
THE SINGING TRUFFLE OF TUSCANY

ITALY – home of the great operatic tenors – Gigli, Caruso, Pavarotti – but the best kept secret of all is the amazing Singing Truffle (*Truffela canzona*) found only deep in the Tuscan forests where it sings its haunting melancholic arias. If music be the food of love, this is the truffle for you!

Price £5,000 per gramme (plus p+p)

Get the better of the Nanny State
Beat the plastic bag ban with the Gnome patented

BAGPLUS



This easy-to-operate machine will provide you with an unlimited supply of bags in MINUTES. Feed the liquid plastic into your Bagplus and – hey presto! – you have enough bags to last you a lifetime.

£470,000 ***(self assembly)***

Now you can shave in the dark with...

[redacted]

Don't disturb your partner when you need to shave on those early mornings. Yes, it's the razor that thinks it's a torch or the torch that thinks it's a razor. Either way you're a winner stubble-wise! Works via solar power

Plays theme tune from TV's Gavin and Stacey

Price £179.32

Christmas Novelty

Scare your friends with the
COMMANDER CRESSIDA DICK
HORROR MASK

This lifelike rubber mask is guaranteed to spread terror – watch your loved ones dive behind the sofa in fear of being shot by her highly trained marksmen.

Price 12p (packet of 3)

Weight Watchers!

FIB-O-SCALE

Sick and tired of being told you're overweight by traditional scales? Now thanks to this speak-your-weight miracle from Mauritius you will always register at your ideal weight. With the tactful Fib-O-Scale at home you won't even have to give up your favourite pies and cakes!

Choice of voices: Gok Wan, Trinny and Susannah, Alan Bennett

Four letter fun for all the family!! With the
Gordon Ramsay

Sodit

Test your reflexes with this up-to-date variant on the classic toy. Try and keep up as Gordon shouts his instructions **'Sod it!' 'Fuck it' 'Bugger it'** etc. etc.

PRICE £999

Take-Away Coffee Lovers!

Coffee-To-Go

No more scalded-hand-from-hot-coffee-beaker misery! Just place paper cup in the easy-grip Coffee-To-Go – and away you go!

Fits the following: **Slim Full-Fat Latte, Double Regular With Wings, Single Tall Decaff Cappuccino, Americano With Fries.**

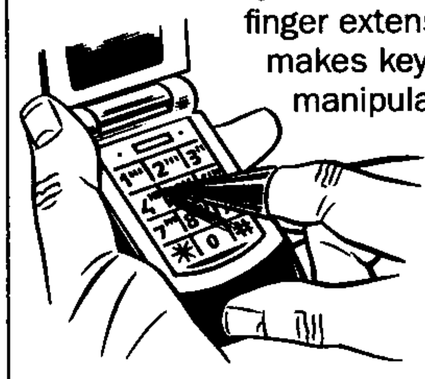
£99.99 *(not including coffee)*

Plays theme tune from Frasier.

☆ **Fat Fingered Folk!** ☆

THE DIGITEXTER

Do you have problems keying in texts to business contacts and friends? Well not any more. This easy-to-use slimline finger extension makes keypad manipulation as simple as ABC!

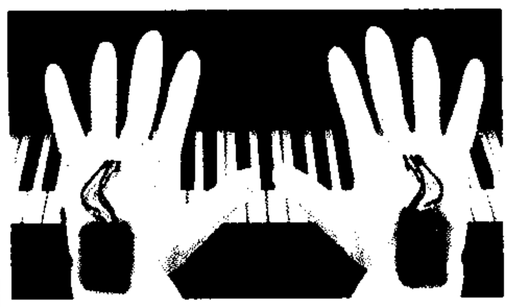


Works with Samsung, Nokia, Motorola, iPhone, Blackberry and most TV remotes.

Price: 95p (Box of 5).

Can't play the piano? You ***can*** *now, Maestro, with the*

MusicGlovers



With this incredible electronic digital breakthrough from Taiwan, you simply slip on the MusicGlovers and away you go! Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Chopin – they're all literally at the tip of your fingers!

Price **£2,799** per glove

Says world famous concert pianist Alan Rusbridger, "I don't know what I'd do without my MusicGlovers".

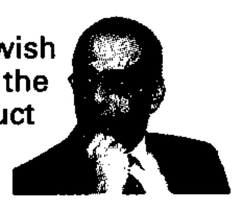
Don't lose your best ideas! Now you can jot them down ***as*** you think them up with

BACK-OF-THE-ENVELOPE ™

A HANDY pack of ten old envelopes allows you to record for posterity all those great thoughts that would have vanished into thin air.

PRICE: 9p per pack (10p self-sealed)

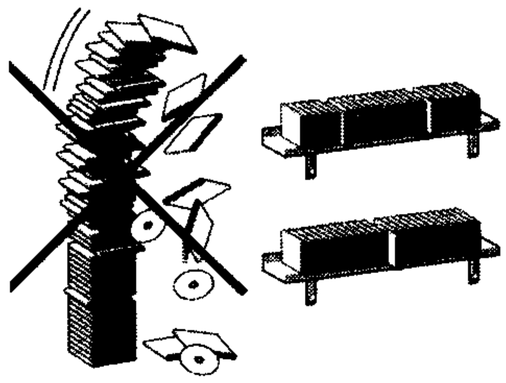
Says TV's Dragon, ***Theo Paphitis,*** "I wish I had jotted down the idea for this product on the back of an envelope!"



CD LOVERS

Say goodbye to toppling CD stack misery with the new

CD-Shelf ™



The very latest in storage technology allows you to keep all your favourite CDs tidy'n'safe from falling over and getting damaged. ☆ Price £19.99

Colours: Ronnie Wood, Lesley Ash, Courtney Pine

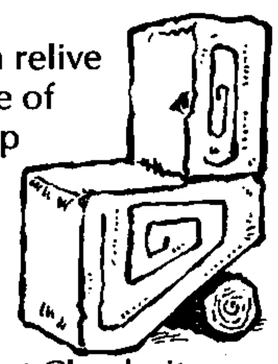
Warning: *CD shelf may collapse*

Gnomes Past

THE MAYAN STAIRLIFT

MADE from authentic carved stone blocks, the Mayan stairlift will transport you up the stairs and back in time!

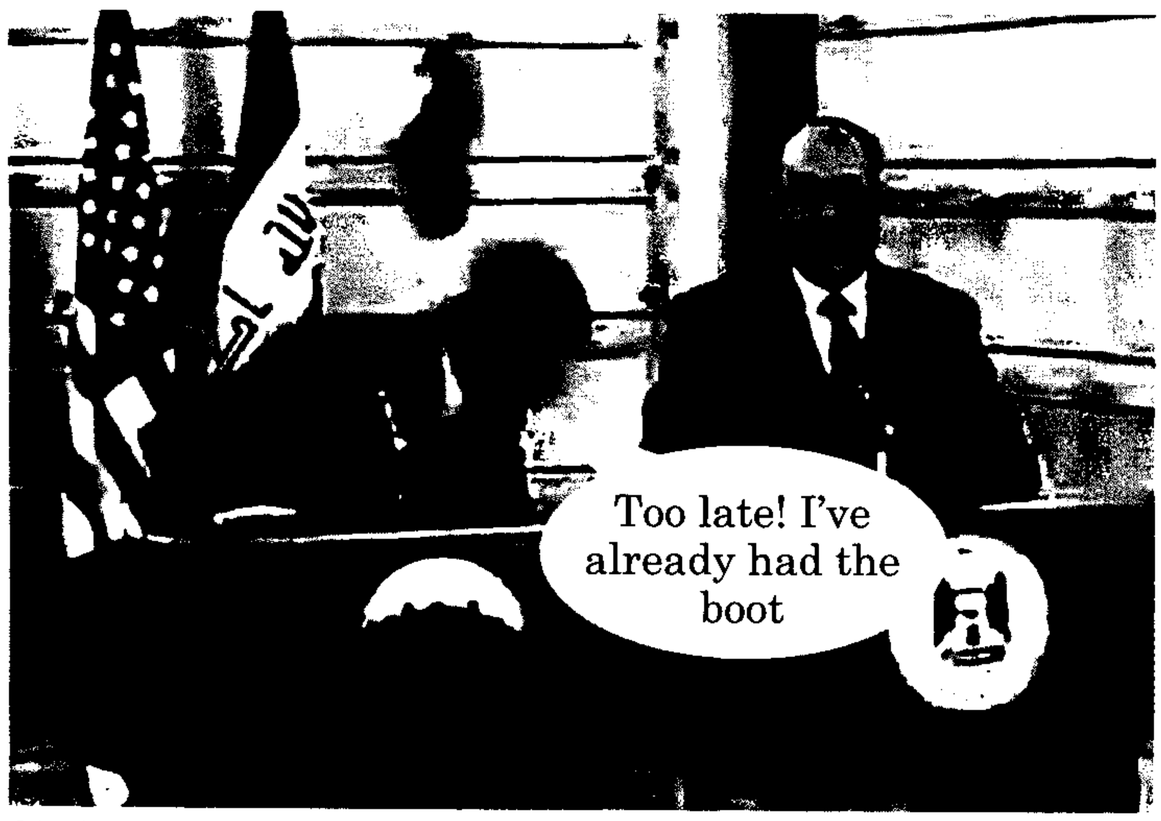
Yes, you can relive the mystic age of pagan worship and human sacrifice with this genuine-style chair inspired by the pyramids at Chechnitza and Teotihuacan.



Price £9,999. (Batteries not included – Sun God powered)

**except where it's not*

BUSH ATTACKED BY SHOE



ON OTHER PAGES: Do you remember where you were when you heard the news that George Bush was almost hit by a shoe in Baghdad? **2** Did the shoe-thrower act alone or was the CIA involved? **3** Pictures of Iraqi Grassy Knoll **4-94**

'BLAIR WAS ALWAYS A CONSERVATIVE,' Top Aide Claims

by Our Religious Correspondent **Christina O'Fatherlhavesinned**

ONE OF Tony Blair's former top lieutenants last night revealed that during his years in Downing Street, Tony Blair had been "a secret Conservative all along".

The former Prime Minister told viewers to the popular religious programme *Good Morning Has Broken*, "It is true that I have always been strongly drawn towards Conservatism, which is a strong and ancient faith. I have long been attracted to the example of the Blessed Margaret Thatcher, but I could never admit this openly when I was in power. People would have thought that I was a bit of a nutter and I could have lost my job.

"But," Mr Blair continued, "I now feel free to talk openly about my faith and my beliefs, which is why I now go every morning to the bank to worship money.

Holy In The Wall

"My wife has always been a devout capitalist and was always trying to get me to make as much money as I could. And now at last I am free to do so without any pretence."

During his 10 years at Number Ten, Tony Blair played down his Conservative convictions, telling journalists "I don't do greed".

But now he is no longer ashamed to profess his true Conservative beliefs to all the world.

BANK SLASHES INTEREST RATE TO MINUS TEN PERCENT

by Our City Staff **Fred Needle**

IN A shock move today, designed to restore confidence in Britain's economy, the Bank of England lowered the bank rate to its lowest level since the Wars of the Roses.

Said Governor Mervyn King, "Slashing the rate to minus ten percent will help savers and give the economy the kick-start it needs to recover by 2031".

The banks have agreed to pass on this cut in full to their savers, which means that for every £100 deposited, the bank will only have to give back £90, unless it goes bankrupt in the meantime.

In that eventuality, the bank will give back no pounds.

Said Gordon Brown, "This is a great deal for Britain's savers or my name's not John Maynard Keynes".

'I WAS JOHN LENNON,' Claims Paul McCartney

by Our Pop Correspondent **John Paul George** and **Ringo Sartre**

IN AN amazing outburst that has rocked the world of popular music, Sir Paul McCartney has revealed that he was the anti-war political thinker and activist in the Beatles.

Said Sir Paul, "People have got it wrong. It wasn't John who was the serious one, writing songs about war and revoluation and that. It was, like me, Macca.

"John hadn't even heard of Vietnam and the bomb until I wrote *'Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da, Life goes on, Whoa!'*.

The world's greatest ever living composer went on to prove his point by showing some previously unseen songs which he penned after being inspired by meeting the late Bertrand Russell on a CND march in 1958.

Macca's Political Pop Songs That Would Have Changed The World

- **Eleanor Roosevelt**
- **We don't want to live in a Trident submarine**
- **When I'm 1968**
- **Killing Fields Forever**
- **Political Paperback Writer (E.P. Thompson)**
- **Imagine (I'm John Lennon)**

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam
Kathy Staff, actress.

So. Farewell
Then Kathy Staff.
Better known as
Nora Batty
From *Last*
Of The Summer
Wine.
You were one of the
original cast.

Were you the
Last of the
Last Of The
Summer Wine?

Or is there still
Someone alive who I've
Forgotten?

I had this
Problem with my
Famous elegy for
Charles Bronson,
When I could not
Remember which of
The Magnificent
Seven were still
With us.

All together now –
Dum di-da-da-dum
Dum di-da-da-dum
Da-da
Di-da-DA-da...

E.J. Thribb (Magnificent 17½)

● A Christmas podcast of this poem, read by Andrew Motion, can be downloaded from www.thribbthoushouldbelivingatthishour.com.

Telegraph Xmas Charity Appeal 2008 Phone-In Day

This Christmas, times are tougher than ever and a lot of people are feeling the pinch – largely because we've sacked them.

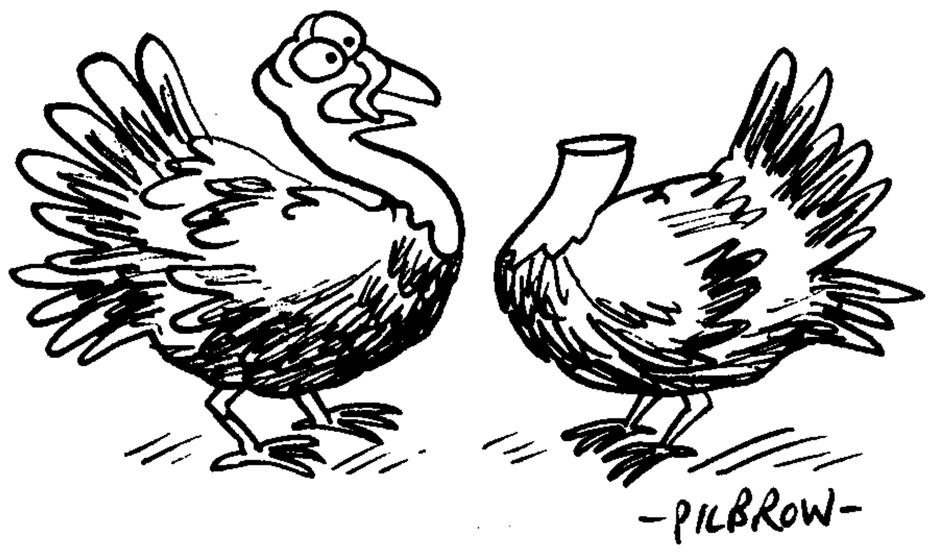
So, this Sunday we're asking you to ring up some of the Telegraph's best-known names to whom we've given the boot and pledge them some money. Please help make their Christmas a happy one – unlike us. Even a small amount can go some way to make up for the fact that they're fired.

Thank you.

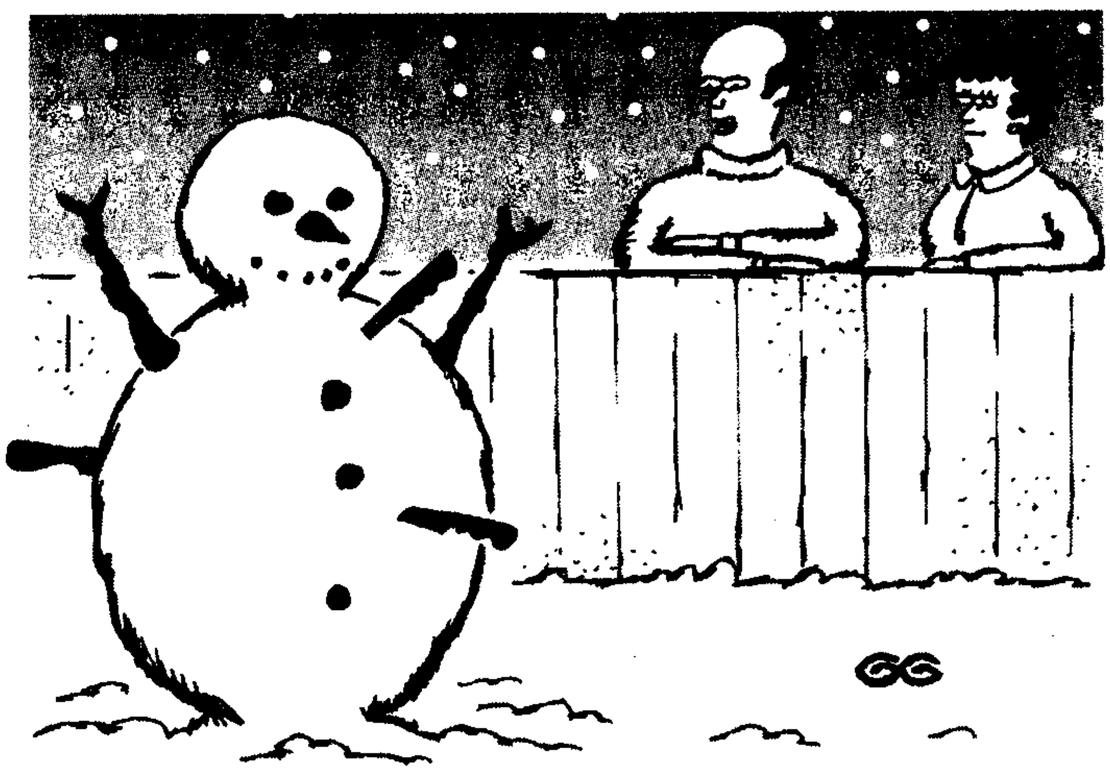
Thirsty Will Lewis, Editor

The Three Incredibly Unwise Men

"WOW – You've lost weight. I didn't think it was possible at Christmas"



"Just making a few cutbacks this year kids!"



"Kids today!"

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Ed Stourton

So. Farewell
Then Ed
Stourton. You
Have been sacked
From the *Today*
Programme.

Were you
Too posh?

Were you
No good?

No one
Seems to know.

But the
Head of Radio
Four has decided
That's enough
Ed.

Ed. J. Thribb (17½)

MAN GROWS BEARD

by Our Entire Staff

A MAN yesterday was reported to have grown a beard. Said friends close to the man, "He clearly hasn't shaved for a while which may explain the beard". There was, however, fevered speculation amongst beard watchers about the permanence of the man's facial growth. "He may well shave it off," said one. "Or, alternatively, he may not. All we can say for sure is that, as of this moment, he has a beard."

Lord Black – An Apology

WE, in common with many other commentators, may have in recent years denigrated the former proprietor of the *Daily Telegraph*, Conrad Black, as a wholly unsuitable figure to control the destinies of one of Britain's best-loved and most-respected newspapers.

We now realise, following the acquisition of the Telegraph Group by the Barclay twins, that Lord Black was in comparison a wise, civilised, articulate, well-read, humane model proprietor, whose commitment to the higher values of journalism and the welfare of his staff was paramount.

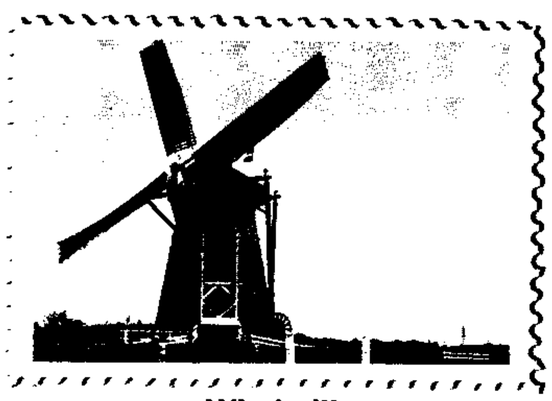
It is unthinkable that Lord Black would have presided over the collapse of editorial standards, the general dumbing-down and now the mass-sackings which have characterised the lamentable regime of the increasingly unbalanced Barclay brothers in their remote island bunker.

We would like to apologise unreservedly to Lord Black for describing him as "a shameless crook married to a grasping harridan" and make it clear that, compared to the Barclay brothers, he was a shining beacon of proprietorial probity and rectitude.

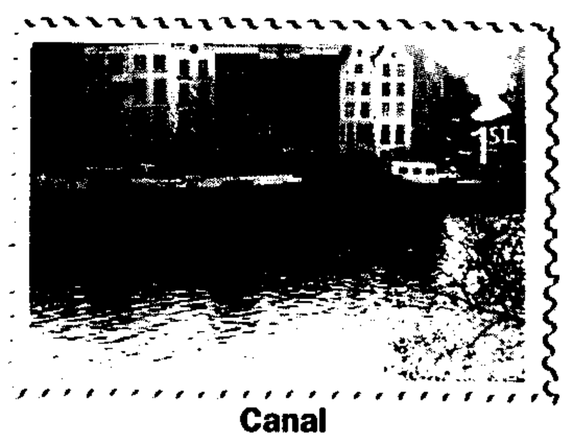
Come back, Conrad, all is forgiven! (Except, of course, the stealing of the shareholders' money.)

New from the Royal Dutch Mail

To celebrate the takeover of Britain's postal service by a Dutch company, (TNT – they're dynamite!), a new set of British stamps is to be issued on January 1st.

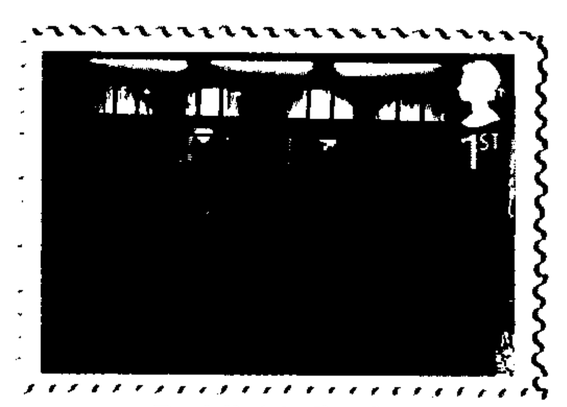


Windmill



Canal

Tulips



Red light district

On sale from your nearest post office (Eindhoven)

Daily Mail
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 26, 2008

HAS STRICTLY COME DANCING CAUSED HOUSE PRICE COLLAPSE?

by Daily Mail Editor
Paul Dancer

HAS the BBC caused the biggest downturn in the British property market since records began?

That is the question I was asking myself after lunch yesterday and the answer is all too clear.

Tess Daly Mail

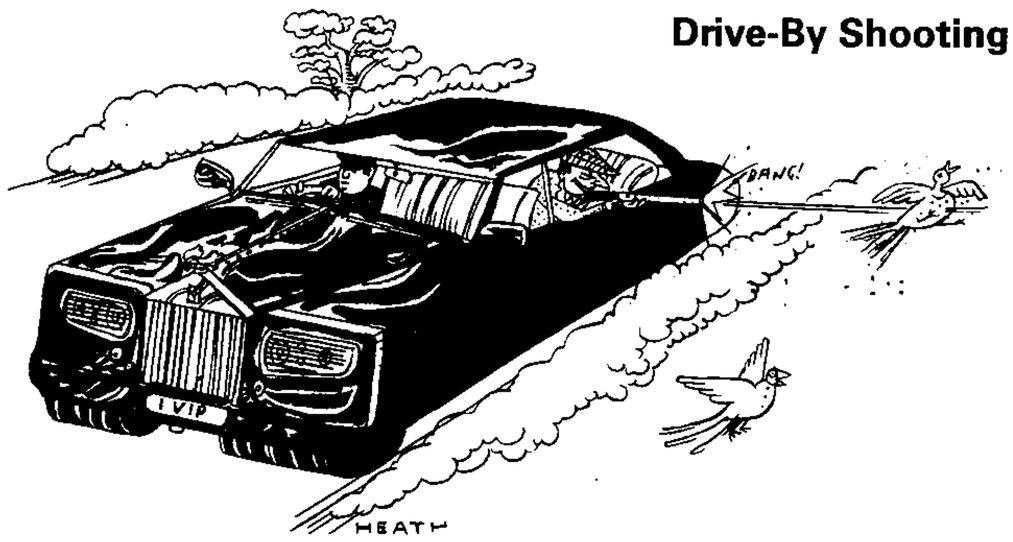
Yes! The BBC, the bloated, out-of-control, bureaucratic broadcasting monopoly has yet again overnight single-handedly wiped billions of pounds off UK house prices and angered millions of Britain's hard-pressed home-owners.

How? Simple... by deceiving them into spending their hard-earned 15p on a pointless semi-final vote for Strictly Come Dancing, instead of paying off their mortgages.

Broadcasting House Prices

Said one furious phone voter, Mr Madeup, "I was about to buy a five-bedroomed house and restore confidence in the UK property market, but the BBC cruelly conned me into throwing my money away – and now I can never afford even a cardboard box in the gutter again because *(cont. p. 94)*

Drive-By Shooting



BANKER'S $50 BILLION SCAM SHOCKS WORLD

by Our City Staff **Phil Boots**

MONEY men across the world were in a state of shock last night at the news that one of the world's top bankers had pulled off the greatest fraud in history.

Bernard Madoffwiththecash had swindled investors out of $50 billion in the most daring pyramid selling scheme since the time of the ancient pharaohs.

"It is absolutely outrageous," said one leading City investment banker, Fred Needle, "I mean, everyone knows that we bankers are all terrific crooks. But this is ridiculous – I mean, $50 billion is more than the rest of us have stolen all put together."

Through Hedge Fund Backwards

"And, to make matters worse, this crook has stolen the cash from his fellow crooks. Has the man no morals at all?

"Honestly, a lot of us are seriously out of pocket. I invested a lot of my clients' money in this obviously fraudulent scam, expecting to make millions myself, and what happens? The money vanishes into thin air. You've got to hand it to Mr Ripoff. Bloody brilliant. I wish I'd thought of it."

RESPECTED FINANCIAL GURU WAS FRAUDSTER SHOCK

by Our Wall Street Staff **Bernard Madoffwiththemoney**

A DISTINGUISHED senior figure in the world of banking was revealed last night to be "nothing more than a conman".

"Everyone in the City trusted him," said one financial commentator, "and investors put their faith in his ability to look after their savings."

Investment Bonkers

"In reality he just took their hard earned cash up front and then pretended to give it back to them by borrowing even more money."

Millions of ordinary people have lost everything and the fraudster himself confessed yesterday, "It was basically a giant *Gordonzi* scheme, just a form of pyramid selling in which the gullible public believed I have amazing financial acumen."

Gordon Brown continued, "The fact is that I've lost billions and billions of *(contd p 94)*.

SUPERWOMAN SAYS

The Madoff Victims Revealed

Otis B. Driftwood – CEO Driftwood Investments.

Herman Hackensacker III – Secretary, Palm Springs Golf Club.

The Royal Bank of Scotland.

Mrs Marty Schmuck – Director, Schmuck & Schmuck.

Irving P. Born-Yesterday Jnr – Chairman Born Yesterday Real Estate Co (Wyoming).

Howard – The bloke with glasses from the Halifax Ad.

El Stupido Banca di Espagna.

Rufus T. Firefly – Fund Manager, Firefly, Benson and Hedge Funds.

Save The Ant – Registered Charity (Antigua).

(That's enough greedy idiots. Ed)

THOSE BANKERS DAVID CAMERON WANTS TO SEE FACING RETRIBUTION FOR THEIR IRRESPONSIBLE ACTIONS IN FULL

1. Nat Rothschild...
2. Er...
3. That's it.

Sterling Update

"A pound for your thoughts, dear?"

BRITAIN – INCREDIBLE CLOSING-DOWN SALE NOW ON!

FOREIGNERS: TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE FOLLOWING AMAZING BARGAINS!

£1 WAS €1.6 *NOW* just €1!

£10 WAS $18 *NOW* $14!

£100 *WAS* 2,757,432 Zimbabwe Dollars NOW One goat!

HURRY! HURRY! WHILE STOCKS & SHARES LAST!

All these and more at the amazing Goodbye UK Farewell Sale!

A Christmas Message from the London Mayor

CRIPES, what a miserable job this Mayor lark is. I have just had to tell yet another of my top chaps to walk the plank. This is getting beyond a joke. I've now lost four of the buggers in as many months. And talking of buggers, what was it Oscar said? 'To lose one top adviser is pretty embarrassing, but to lose four on the trot makes you look a bit of a jolly old laughing stock.' I mean, blimey, how was I to know that this mobile phone wallah David Ross was a bad egg? My poor chum Dave Cameron swore by him. Told me that he'd made piles of dosh and shovelled quite a bit of it our way. Not to mention lending Dave his helicopter to fly up to ghastly places up north to press the flesh with the great unwashed. Anyway, old Bojo thought it was a bit of a wheeze to put Ross in charge of the Olympics, I mean flogging BlackBerrys and organising the world's biggest sporting event – same thing really, when you think about it, which I can't say I have, but it's definitely on the agenda. And anyway chummie Ross had a pretty good eye for the top totty. Did you see that corker he was with on the front page of the Telegraph? Phworr!! Wouldn't mind getting her car phone number and taking her off into the warehouse!!!

© Beano Boris, Mayor of London and Daily Telegraph columnist.

It's Your Line To Red Ken On LBC

Ken: Next caller, please.

Caller: Hello, Ken, this is Colin from Colindale.

Ken: Hello, Colin.

Colin: As a lifelong left wing activist Ken, you must be appalled at the coroner's verdict in the Menezes case. I mean, the point is, Ken, the police have been given total license to shoot whoever they want. Isn't that right, Ken?

Ken: No, caller, I think you'll find that Sir Ian Blair and his officers acted in the best interest of Londoners and don't forget that, as Sir Ian pointed out, this was a fog of war situation and there are always unfortunately casualties in...

Colin: I don't believe I'm hearing this, Ken. What a load of boll...

Ken: Next caller, please.

Caller: Hi, Ken. This is Chelsey from Chelsea

Ken: Hello, Chelsey, you're through to Red Ken.

Caller: I mean, you know it's really scandalous – this Cressida Dick woman is still in the police and has even been promoted – don't you agree, Ken?

Ken: I absolutely do agree, Chelsey. If anyone deserves promotion it is Cressida, a fine officer as are all the outstanding police officers in London who are out on the streets risking their lives shooting unarmed civilians. Next caller, please.

Caller: It's Inspector Knacker here. Knacker of the Yard.

Ken: Hello, Inspector. I hope you are not calling me up to ask me about the finances of London when I was mayor or the unfortunate business of Mr Jasper and...

Knacker: No, Ken. Me and the boys just wanted to say love the programme and Happy Christmas to you and your listeners.

Ken: Thank you, Inspector. So, we have heard it from the horse's mouth. Boris to blame for the Stockwell shooting

(cont. 94 kHz)

CHRISTMAS FILMS

They Took The Train To Bruges (2008)

The Eurostar takes over from the iconic Lancaster bomber in this remake and arrives six hours late after a fire in the tunnel. Gerard Depardieu plays the driver, the legendary Chalky White (formerly the pilot), and Jim Broadbent delights as the Ebbsfleet International Station Master.

Rocky 31 (2007)

Last in the series of the iconic Sly Stallone Rocky series. Now in his eighties, Rocky climbs into the ring for his final comeback against a nineteen-year-old Islamic Fundamentalist champion-in-the-making. Classic final round in which Rocky triumphs.

Blue Ridge Valley (2007)

Moving tale of two lonely, gay, long-horn steers who find solace in each other's company while grazing on the lush pastures of Wyoming.

Robin Worm And his Merry Worms (2005)

Brilliant Pixar animation takes a "worm's–eye view" of the classic legend, now set in Sherwood Forest. Can Robin Worm and his band of loyal followers save their forest from the multi-national chemical company which wants to cut it down. Famous voices include Robin Williams (Robin Worm), Nicole Kidman (Worm Marian), Eddie Murphy (Little Worm) and Stephen Fry as the evil Sheriff of Wormingham.

A Wedding Too Many (2004)

Ageing, five-times divorced orthodontist Jack Nicholson decides to get married again – but deliberately chooses the same day that his daughter (Cameron Diaz) has picked to wed a handsome young baseball star (Owen Wilson) of whom he disapproves. No one has reckoned on the mother-in-law from hell (Jane Fonda). Terrific score by James Goldsmith.

Hamlet-Jee (2006)

Lavish Bollywood adaptation of Shakespeare's timeless tragedy, but with a happy ending and a fabulous song-and-dance wedding of Hamlet-Jee (played by Virender Sehwag) and Ophelia-Jee (Shilpa Shetty), set in the grounds of the Taj Mahal.

It's A Fair Cop (1956)

Classic Ealing comedy (b/w). Alistair Sim is the bank manager with a secret gambling habit who decides to rob his own bank. Also starring Jack Warner, Sid James and Joyce Grenfell.

(That's enough Christmas films. Ed.)

Theatre Highlights

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

At the Whitehall Theatre (A GorDonmar Production)

TRADITIONAL Dickens story now in modern dress. Ebenezer Brown is a hard-faced miser who for eleven years has hoarded his money refusing to help out the poor and needy. But when the ghost of Christmas Future arives and shows him losing the election Brown repents and showers money on everyone he meets, "You humbug" they all shout.

Ebenezer Scrooge.....Gordon Brown
Ghost of Xmas Past.....Tony Blair
Ghost of Xmas Yet To Come.....Vince Cable
Tiny Tim.....David Miliband

DIARY

NIGELLA'S CHRISTMAS TURKEY

I always say that there's nothing quite so voluptuous as a Christmas Turkey. When I see it there, all bronzed and sizzling on our dining table, its legs akimbo, its plump breasts so vast, so juicy, so succulent, so beseeching – yes, in that instant I know the meaning of *l'amour*.

We all have our own ways of handling the seductive charms of the moist turkey. Some probe; others delve. Some dive deep, deep, deep, while others prefer to give all their attention to the skin, imbibing that gorgeous scent through whatever orifices come to hand then licking, tearing, gobbling and – oh yes! – swallowing.

Turkey is, to my mind, best consumed within the softly enfolding after-glow of a full moon. Oh, to nibble on the most slender sliver of breast as the silver-blue light shimmers enticingly upon its juicy curves! Then, and only then, can one fully experience the taste-bud heaven that is turkey. On a more practical level, I always store at least three or four turkeys ready-cooked in my deep freeze for when the next full moon comes a-calling. There's nothing my friends and family like more when setting eyes on a full moon than to rush to the deep-freeze for all the pre-cooked turkeys they can carry. And if a frozen turkey is at first a bit on the hard side – well, who's complaining, ladies? Not me!

Ingredients: One 12lb turkey; 900g good sausage meat.

Your fresh young turkey will come trussed and bound, naked but for great swathes of string tightly bound around its chest and its legs and its *derriere*. "I am your obedient slave!" it seems to be saying, "Do with me what you will!"

But all naughty turkeys must learn their lesson. Ignore its beseechings. This is the time to leave it just as it is, unable to move, while you go off an enjoy yourself. Why not pour yourself a delicious warm bath, full of the most exotic oils and unguents? Return to the kitchen in your own good time and you will find the turkey still there, still trussed up and rigid, its body almost quivering in anticipation of what you are about to do to it.

You've had your fun. Now is the time to act! With a few deft strokes, slide your fingers all over its body, removing every last bit of string or trussing from your turkey and thus shake it free of all bondage. Immediately, it will seem to expand. Now go deep within and wash the inside of your bird with ice-cold running-water. Never mind the drips! How glamorous it now looks, and how liberated! The sight of the washed turkey, it always reminds me of Anita Ekberg dancing in the Trevi fountain in La Dolce Vita. Call me silly, but for some reason, I've always had this thing about water glistening on the bare shoulders of a naked turkey.

Drain well, and blot dry with kitchen towels, taking care to pamper those hidden crevices. I've always loved to guide my fingers delicately through all those long-lost nooks and crannies, playing my beloved turkey like a grand piano. Sometimes, I will invite friends over for a turkey-blotting party. One by one, we all take it in turns to smother the bounteous bird with all the love we can muster.

Pre-heat the oven to 200° C/gas 6.

Take your turkey and, using your finger tips, *pry*. Wiggle some space between the skin and those vast, accommodating breasts. Into this space, squeeze your sausage meat, pushing, pressing, coaxing and surging so that it covers the whole breast, in all its magnificent glory. Some people prefer to use oil all over, just to give it that faint but undeniable frisson that always comes when fingers touch skin. Others like to dress it in something fabulous from Vivienne Westwood. *Chacun a son gout*, as they say in La France. Now, from on top of the skin, mould it with your outstretched hand so that the breast is voluptuously but smoothly bulging. By now it should be yielding to your every touch, and begging you silently for more.

Secure the flaps of skin over the oozing cavity with a meat skewer so that the sausage meat doesn't escape during the roasting. If, despite all your warnings, it does manage to escape then you will be left with no alternative but to whack it back in with a resounding thump. Another skewer may well be in order, methinks! Ouch! Be sure to let that little turkey minx know who's boss!

Now squeeze your turkey breast securely into a skin-tight tin and let it roast for about 2 hours and 40 minutes, basting periodically. An excellent idea for a get-together with friends and family is to throw a basting party, where between ten (10) and twenty (20) guests take turns to open the oven door and, clutching tight to your most curvaceous and voluminous ladle, to pour those fragrant juices all over the outstretched bird, thus keeping it wonderfully juicy and moist. Baste! Baste! Baste! More! Yes! Yes! YES!

Now, where was I? At this stage, I always enjoy a favourite cigarette. And relax.By now, the skin of your divine turkey should be a delicious all-over brown. If you want some idea of how the well-basted turkey should look, just think Halle Berry emerging in her skimpy bikini from the storm-tossed sea in Die Another Day. For a skimpy-bikini effect just like Halle's, why not wrap a wafer-thin sheet of buttered foil over the upper curves of this most generously proportioned and altogether desirable of farmyard animals?

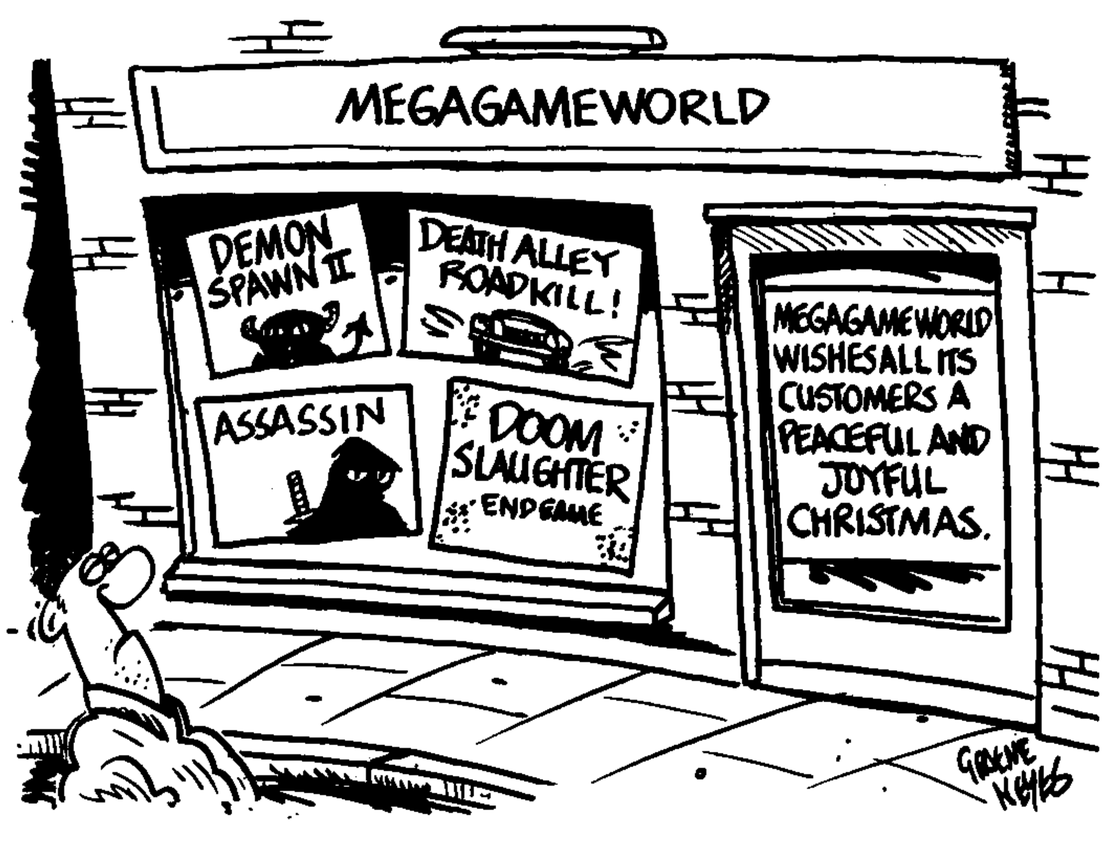
When you think it's ready, press and – yes! – pierce your turkey with your long blade, preferably around that luscious area where the leg meets the rest of the body. Take it slowly, very slowly. Just lie back and wait, letting those precious juices trickle out. Lick! Lick! Lick! Mmmm!

After it's all over, why not pull a cracker or two – or better still, get a close friend or two to pull them with you? Mmmmm!

Fabulous! Don't stop!

NEXT WEEK: Everything you always wanted to know about brandy butter... but didn't dare ask.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN



Literary Review

The Original And The Best

BOOKS OF THE YEAR 2008 Log Rolling Awards

The Craig Raine Backscratcher of the Year Award

Winners

Richard Holmes and Michael Holroyd in the *Guardian*. Holmes chose Holroyd's *A Strange Eventful History: The Dramatic Lives of Ellen Terry, Henry Irving and their Remarkable Families* and had the favour returned in the very next paragraph, when Holroyd chose Holmes' *The Age of Wonder*.

Runner-up

Ian Thomson in the *Evening Standard* puffing JG Ballard's *Miracles of Life*. Ballard contributed a preface to the recent reissue of Thomson's Haitian travelogue, *Bonjour Blanc*.

Highly commended

Frances Stonor Saunders in the *New Statesman* recommending "a literary Christmas stocking" in the shape of the new issue of Craig Raine's *Arete* magazine. She is in charge of marketing at... *Arete*.

Most Blatant Thank You Letter Award

Winner

John Gray in the *Guardian* for selecting Will Self's *Liver*. Self's description of Gray as "the most important living philosopher" appears on the jacket of *Black Mass* by John Gray.

Runner-up

AS Byatt in both the *Guardian* **and** the *FT*, who picked Philip Hensher's *Northern Clemency* ("wise, strong and unputdownable"). Hensher raved earlier in the year in the Spectator about *A Whistling Woman* by AS Byatt.

Highly commended

Historian Michael Burleigh in the *Evening Standard*, who praised the "inspirational" *Masters and Commanders* by Andrew Roberts, fellow hawk and keen admirer of... Burleigh's *Blood and Rage*.

The Puffing Your Own Publisher Award

Winner

Fourth Estate novelist Philip Hensher in the *Spectator*, whose choices included Philip Hoare's *Leviathan* (Fourth Estate), JG Ballard's *Miracles of Life* (Fourth Estate) and Jacob Ross's *Pynter Bender* (Fourth Estate).

Runners-up

Faber author Adam Mars-Jones in the *Observer* for his thoughts on Nadeem Aslam's *The Wasted Vigil* (Faber); Little, Brown author Dominic Sandbrook in the *Evening Standard* for picking Tom Holland's *Millennium* (Little, Brown); Penguin author Niall Ferguson in the *New Statesman* for choosing Philip Bobbitt's *Terror and Consent* (Penguin).

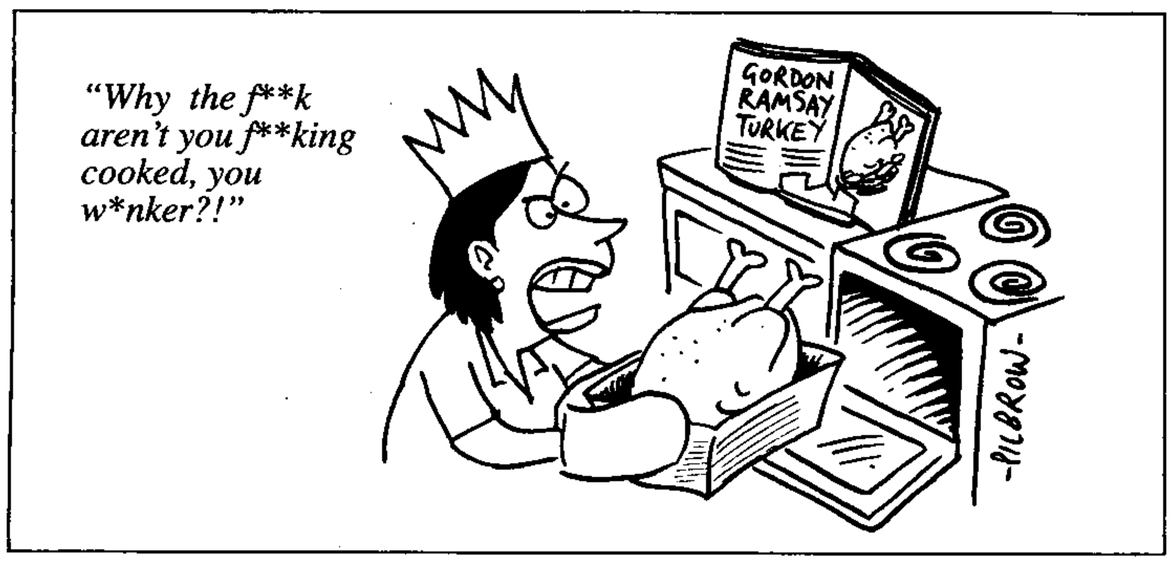
Best Irish Log Rolling Award

Winner

Paul Muldoon in the *TLS* for picking four Irish books – by Ronan Kelly, Ed Moloney, Sebastian Barry and Joseph O'Neill – and nothing else.

Runners-up

Roy Foster in the *TLS* and Sebastian Barry in the *Guardian*, both choosing three Irish books.



*"Why the f**k aren't you f**king cooked, you w*nker?!"*

The TLS Most Incestuous Publication Award

Winner

The *TLS*. Karl Miller in the *TLS* plugged ex-*TLS* editor Ferdinand Mount's *Cold Cream*. Mount in the *Spectator* enthused about *TLS* poetry editor Mick Imlah's *The Lost Leader*. Former *TLS* deputy editor Alan Hollinghurst also raved about Imlah in the *Guardian*. Meanwhile, Robert Irwin in the *TLS* chose Stefan Collini's *Common Readings*. Collini is a contributor to... the *TLS*.

Runners-up

The *Sunday Times*. The *ST*'s Roland White praised the *ST*'s Jeremy Clarkson in the *Sunday Times* humour roundup, while *Style* magazine deputy editor Camilla Long gave the thumbs-up to staff writer Cosmo Landesman's memoir *Starstruck*, previously serialised and generously reviewed... in the *ST*.

The *Times*. Giles Whittell from the *Times* devoted a whole column in the *Times* to books written during the year... by other journalists at the *Times*.

Highly commended

The *New Yorker*'s Alex Ross in the *Guardian*, hailing *How Fiction Works* by the *New Yorker*'s James Wood.

The *Mail on Sunday*'s chief sports writer Patrick Collins, urging readers to check out Ian Ridley's biography of Kevin Keegan (without mentioning that Ridley is the *Mail on Sunday*'s chief football correspondent).

The Self-Plugging Award

Winner

Paul Theroux chooses only one book in the *Guardian* – Patrick French's biography of VS Naipaul, "which vindicates me in my much criticised portrait of the man in *Sir Vidia's Shadow*".

Runner-up

Gordon Brown in the *Guardian* praises a biography of FD Roosevelt, the great reforming leader who saved his citizens from economic disaster. "He had the courage to innovate and improvise," writes the PM, author of *Courage: Eight Portraits*.

The Frederic Raphael Most Ostentatiously Highbrow Award

Winner

Frederic Raphael in the *TLS*, who enjoyed a number of abstruse shelf-fillers, including Carl Djerassi's *Four Jews on Parnassus* ("in which Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, Gershon Scholem and Arnold Schoenberg are summoned from the dead and set to argue").

Runner-up

Stephen Bayley in the *New Statesman*, recommending Simon Henley's *The Architecture of Parking* ("There are layers of postmodern irony in the subject of the multi-storey car park... a Pevsner of Parking").

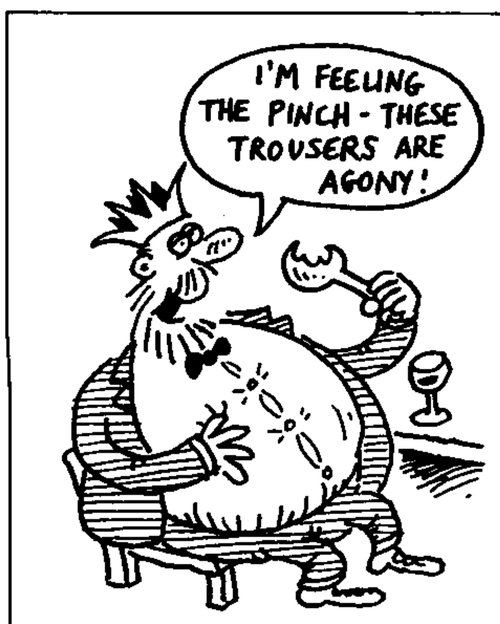
Highly commended

Old favourite Bevis "Sillier" Hillier in the *Spectator*, with JG Spiers and JP Leighfield's edition of the *Exeter College Oxford JCR Suggestion Book* and *The Cathedral Cat* ("a little book of historically based tales, each with some link to Exeter Cathedral") by Canon Professor Nicholas Orme DD, D Litt, D Phil, FSA.

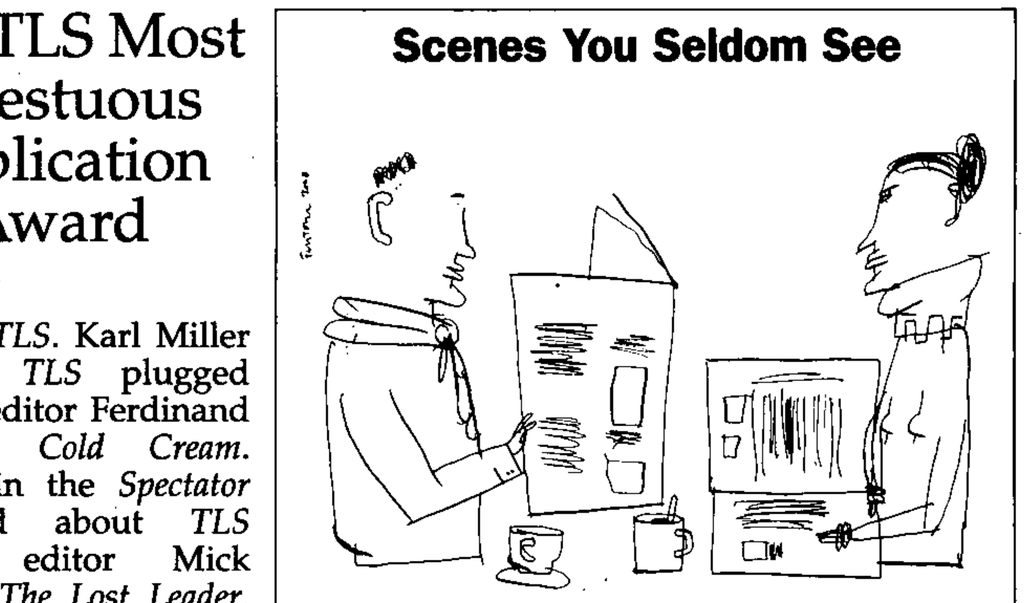
The Feeding The Hand That Bit You Award

Winner

Satanic Slut and Andrew Sachs' grand-daughter Georgina Baillie, who directed readers of the *Observer* to the paperback of Russell Brand's *My Booky-Wook* ("A bit disturbing in places and it displays a weird opinion of women, but well put together"). Another year or two and they'll be doing panto together.



Snipcock & Tweed is closed for the holidays



"I really look forward to the list of books famous people have read during the year"

WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS, Pt 94

The Hugo Young Papers: Thirty Years of British Politics – Off the Record

(Allen Lane, £30)

SID NODGER *(General Secretary Allied Union of Steeplejacks and Mini-casino slot-machine operatives, member Labour NEC)*, lunch, 12 February 1980

AMERICA: SN says no prospect of Reagan acquiring Republican nomination. If he does, will be defeated. Despite all his problems, Carter will be a difficult man to beat. Foresees a long period of enlightened Democrat government.

FRANCE: Went there on his holidays once. Didn't like the food.

STATE OF THE LABOUR PARTY: SN thinks there are grounds for cautious optimism. Confident they will do well in forthcoming Grimethorpe East by-election*. Mrs Thatcher already a busted flush, disliked by her party and hated by electorate. Will probably leave office by the end of the year. Envisages crushing Labour victory in next General Election. Moon made of green cheese, of which he has consumed several slices.

Of younger Labour contenders, particularly admires Hattersley. Greatly impressed by Hattersley's ascetic lifestyle, refusal of lunch invitations etc. Often sees him out jogging in St James's Park early in the morning.

HY: I was unexpectedly taken by Nodger, a canny and plain-speaking representative of a political constituency whose influence it would be foolish to ignore. Clearly *au fait* with the complexities of the current political situation, in touch with the way the party is thinking. Some notably sharp insights. Hard to imagine a future for Labour in which he does not feature in some shape or other.**

** Won by the Conservatives by a margin of 10,000 votes. The Labour candidate, Councillor Barry Timeserver, lost his deposit.*

*** Nodger resigned from the party's executive on 15 March 1980, having been convicted of embezzling union funds.*

Continues for thousands of pages…

FIRST DRAFTS

The Telephone Directory

UNIVERSITY NEWS

■ THE University of Exeter faces a legal fight after leaving a PhD student in charge of teaching an entire undergraduate module, which he says wrecked his chances of completing his doctorate.

Postgraduate student Paul Jones was in the final year of his PhD in the university's business school and was writing up his thesis in late 2007 when his supervisor, Professor Jonathan Schroeder, jetted off on sabbatical to Australia for several months, telling students he could be contacted by email. As if being left without any face-to-face support at such a crucial time in his research wasn't bad enough for Jones, Prof Schroeder's partner, Dr Janet Borgerson, another lecturer in the department, went with him – leaving Jones to teach her module on consumer research.

As a graduate teaching assistant (GTA), Jones was paid £5,184 a year for providing, er, teaching assistance. That role suddenly included being left in charge of an entire third-year undergraduate module. Jones says that running the course was hugely time-consuming, since he had to get up to speed on a topic that wasn't his specialism, prepare the lectures and provide support to 101 undergraduates who weren't all thrilled to find their module being taught by a GTA rather than a highly qualified academic. Not surprisingly, all that work got in the way of making progress on his PhD. But after Jones protested, Dr Borgerson reminded him that they were the people who write letters of recommendation.

The incredibly long student complaints process finally concluded in November, with the university's complaints appeal committee ruling that it was not unreasonable for Prof Schroeder to go away on leave and provide supervision by email. Although they accepted that Jones had worked far more teaching hours than he was contracted to, they did not agree that it had an adverse effect on his PhD. The university also ruled that Dr Borgerson's comment was not a threat to withhold a fair reference if he didn't teach the module.

Exeter offered a "goodwill payment" of £3,500 in tuition fees, which could be used at a university of Jones's choice. But Jones has rejected that and is applying for legal aid to fight the university for full funding to transfer to another university and complete his PhD with a new supervisor.

In the meantime, the case stands as a warning to postgradate students who take on GTA work to fund their studies – universities think they have them over a barrel.

LUVVIES

I made this just to show some of the internal side of JCVD in a way. He's a guy, just a normal guy from Belgium with dreams.

I like showing what happens between me and me, which is something very beautiful. I really opened myself up in "JCVD". I peeled back the skin of the fruit, cut the pulp and then took that very hard seed. In this film I cut that hard seed, and inside that seed was a kind of liquid cream substance of the man I am…It was like being naked – I would love to be naked in front of you.

Interview with Belgian director J.C. VAN DAMME, *Newsweek*

Submitted by Charmian Hislop (no relation).

CONSERVATION NEWS

■ THE closure of the Textile Conservation Centre (TCC) and cutbacks to training for conservators run by the Royal College of Art and the Victoria & Albert Museum are likely to be followed by other courses because they are unprofitable for universities to run, says a report by the Demos think tank.

Southampton University decided to close the prestigious TCC because the specialist training needed to look after historical materials wasn't financially viable (*Eye* 1199), while the V&A decided that supporting training was no longer a "core activity" for the museum, even though its collection relies on the skills taught (*Eye* 1206).

The report reveals a looming skills shortage, even at major institutions. It says that of the British Library's 58 book conservators, 40 are within 10 years of retirement.

Once the UK loses its expertise, trying to restart courses will be a struggle. The report points to Canberra University in Australia, which closed its conservation programme in 2003. When it reopened this year, not only did it have to re-buy equipment, but most of the best experts who used to teach on the course had decamped to other countries.

Nayan Kulkarni's distinctive lighting columns make Elwick Road and West Street stand out from the crowd and enhance the environment by subtly varying the colour of the light to establish the particular character of the streets. An ordinary street light would not have given Ashford that individual look.

Nayan says: 'The Ashford street light family is a bespoke extended design that caters for all combinations of road and pavement whilst adding a striking, sculptural language."

Kent Profile

To paraphrase Othello – whom the Spaniard would probably have signed for his powerful physique if he'd been given the opportunity – Benitez has spent not wisely but too well.

MATT HUGHES, *The Times*

Pseuds Corner

A riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma (text on screen)… A famous Churchillian reference to Russia might just as easily been used to describe Nicolas Anelka.

IVAN GASKILL, *BBC Football Focus*

As I prepare this script, tapping away at the keyboard as Socrates might have done if he had owned a PC…

EAMONN McCABE, *BBC News Website*

6am Cup of *yerba mate* tea with Silk soya-milk creamer – I'm vegan. Bowl of brown rice with agave nectar, flax-seed oil and rice milk. **8am** Go for a 90-minute hike around the local canyon. **10am** Protein shake with pea protein, coconut water, banana, frozen spinach, frozen blueberries and ground flax-seeds. Shower, then meditate for 20 minutes. Work, **1pm** Burrito with black beans, avocado, salsa, vegan sour cream and soya cheese with rocket salad. Work on 'cleanse' aspect of my book. **4.30pm** My green drink: apple juice, water, Greener Grasses powder, wheatgrass, alfalfa, broccoli and kale. This satisfies sweet cravings. **7pm** My husband and I go to an Italian restaurant. Glass of red wine with a salad and four vegetable side-dishes. **9.30pm** Bed. **'Quantum Wellness: A Step-by-Step Guide to Health and Happiness' is published 1 January.**

KATHY FRESTON, 'My Day on a Plate', *Stella* Sunday Telegraph Magazine.

For me, the thing of 2009 will be rockabilly freedom. Hillbilly meets psychobilly, with a dash of hippie-billiness.

Celebrity stylist CAMILLE BIDAULT-WADDINGTON, H&M Magazine

CONTRIBUTORS: Hazel Dawe, Joe Hickey, Janine Murphy Franklin, Daniel Perez-Valencia, Andrew Bearley, Doreen Simpson.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

CDC

It really is a mauling

NOT a good December for publicly owned international development fund CDC, formerly the Commonwealth Development Corporation, and its shareholder, the Department for International Development. First, a National Audit Office (NAO) report criticised the fund for failing to show development value. Then it was mauled by the Commons public accounts committee (PAC).

Thankfully for CDC chief executive Richard Laing (pictured), however, Christmas comes every month along with his pay packet. In the three years since 2004, he and his senior executives have seen their wedges treble, Laing's to £1m a year.

The NAO report exposed how CDC had been instructed by DfID to compare Laing and co's jobs with a range of others, including much lower-paid staff in other development institutions. But that pay framework was quietly ditched in favour of the best paid element of the comparator group - private equity bosses – without telling DfID. The NAO concluded that the CDC board "approved remuneration… which exceeded levels set in 2004 as requiring consultation with DfID".

Sounds bad; and at the PAC it was clear that CDC chairman Sir Malcolm Williamson was going to take the rap. There's no danger of his head rolling, though, as he has already announced his retirement. When Labour MP Alan Williams raised the subject, Laing was quick to deny responsibility. Williamson agreed it was "nothing to do with Mr Laing, you can blame the remuneration committee".

Laing, who CDC's accounts reveal attended remuneration committees and as chief executive might have known how his pay was arrived at as he watched it treble, was entirely blameless. As Williamson sat on the committee, he was happy to "freely accept responsibility". Chairman of the generous remuneration committee Andrew Williams, boss of private equity firm SVG Capital, warranted not a mention.

DfID official Mark Lowcock explained how, following the cock-up, remuneration consultants were brought in and "we concluded that the right comparators actually were the ones that the company picked without telling us. So the main issue that we had a problem with and were not very happy about was the process". With hindsight the unauthorised pay hikes were justified – so that's all right then!

Even DfID's granting CDC flexibility over bonuses "against explicit advice from the Treasury" was down-played by a Treasury official claiming it "was just that – advice". Lowcock was seen warmly greeting the Treasury man after the hearing with the words: "See you at the next slaughtering!"

Quiller pen

MPs also learnt more about the PR campaign launched by CDC to spin its "development impact".

Laing told Tory MP Richard Bacon that CDC was paying Quiller consultants between £10,000 and £20,000 a month. For this outlay of development funds, likely to be over £50,000 so far, CDC has received advice on who to invite to its 60th anniversary bash, which MPs to schmooze, and how to respond to a draft of the NAO report and changes to the CDC case studies that it uses to selectively impress anybody who is interested.

Thus when Laing was accused by Austin Mitchell MP of deserting agriculture he could quickly deny the charge, despite the plummeting proportion of CDC's cash put into the business, and paint an idyllic picture of one African investment it does have. The coaching for the hearing that Bacon forced Laing to admit having received from Quiller was paying off nicely.

Meanwhile CDC refuses to release more objective internal reports on the subject under freedom of information laws. How surprising! What little the *Eye* has found out so far suggests all is not well since the management of the fund was sold to CDC bosses as Actis in 2004.

Each year CDC gives itself a development impact score, contributing 20 percent to the CDC bosses' bonuses (profit contributes far more). In 2003 CDC gave itself a score of 20 (out of 30), in 2004 it was 23.7, then in 2005, the first full year of Actis management, back down to 19.3. Under the new arrangements CDC's development impact was by its own admission deteriorating. Did this hit bosses in the pocket, since 20 percent of their bonuses are determined by the score? No. In 2005 the target development score was dropped from 20 to 15, so bonuses were secure.

DfID has belatedly reined CDC in somewhat through an investment policy focusing it on the poorest countries, even if the NAO report revealed that CDC's financially-incentivised bosses resisted the change. After several attempts by Laing to justify having poured hundreds of millions into China when private investors were doing so anyway, DfID permanent secretary Nemat Shafik said that as from November there will be no more new cash for the country except for the smallest businesses.

The new policy will be monitored by new chairman Richard Gillingwater. He was boss of the government's shareholder executive until last year – a body Shafik admitted DfID relied on while it was, er, failing to monitor CDC.

NHS IT

Away in a Granger

SIX years after it was conceived by a bunch of IT consultants and blessed by a grinning Tony Blair, the disastrous £13bn National Health Service IT scheme has at last been officially recognised as deeply in the doo-doo.

The well-documented delays, generously estimated at four years, and chaos (*Eyes passim ad nauseam*) stem from the big-is-beautiful approach adopted by the man who set up the programme, Richard Granger. Rather than set standards to which hospitals with hugely varying requirements should develop their own systems, he handed out regional monopoly contracts to four big IT consultancies, who themselves turned to large but completely unprepared software companies.

Now even NHS chief executive David Nicholson (pictured) can see the writing on the wall. This month he conceded to a committee of MPs that the main software, provided by US firm Cerner, was "based on billing, it's been developed in America, and does not take into account a whole series of issues around 18-weeks and patient tracking that we need, as a result we're having to change all of those."

Sound familiar? Nicholson could almost have been reading from the *Eye's* special report on the project, *System Failure (Eye* 1179*)*, back in March 2007 which explained that the software "was proving unfit for purpose because it had been, er, written for US healthcare systems. These were built around billing for care and were unable to produce the data on which NHS management depends".

The other software firm, iSoft, has an even worse record. The new "Lorenzo" system it promised for March 2004 is, claimed Nicholson nearly five years on, "being very tentatively tested". Way to go!

Yet in the couple of years since the *Eye* pointed out the Cerner problem, instead of ditching the project, Nicholson has been "resetting" the contracts relying on its pisspoor product, with hundreds of millions more on offer to an IT industry that now very profitably employs many of the men who handed them the cash (see, for example, last *Eye)*.

That was before Alistair Darling insisted on more efficiency savings to help fund his fiscal stimulus, however. Now even the NHS boss admits: "We've got to think about how we take it forward. We can't go on and on like this." Looks like it might have taken a global economic meltdown to force a re-think.

CANCER SCARE

Diagnosing the problem

THE medical director of a private NHS clinic at the centre of a cancer scare has himself been disciplined for misdiagnosing cancer patients in the US, it has emerged.

The private Shepton Mallet independent sector treatment centre sells procedures to the NHS under the government's privatisation plans. At least one patient there has died of colon cancer after having been given the all-clear by a doctor at the centre. The Dutch doctor who gave a colonoscopy – a bowel examination – to Steve Davies, who died of cancer eight months later, has since resigned and all his procedures are being re-examined.

However, it has also emerged that Dr Naji Abumrad, the medical director of UK Specialist Hospitals, the firm that runs the centre, was found guilty of misconduct in relation to cancer patients in 1997 by the State of New York Department of Health.

Dr Abumrad's failure to diagnose and treat breast cancer in a group of women patients was described as "practising medicine with negligence". The charges related to four patients and included findings that Dr Abumrad failed to properly check that there were "free margins" of cancer free tissue after removing "a very aggressive carcinoma" from one woman's breast, misdiagnosing breast cancer as mastitis and failing to order a biopsy to check whether this was in fact cancer. The American review board also found "other carelessness or failure to practise according to accepted standards". Dr Abumrad was given a "stayed suspension" of his licence, meaning he was put on probation for a year.

Denise Broomfield, solicitor for Steve Davies's widow, told the *Eye*: "I now represent a number of patients who appear to have been misdiagnosed by doctors employed by UK Specialist Hospitals at Shepton Mallet." The company, facing a group of negligence claims, says it "would like to apologise to patients for the concern and distress caused by the independent review of colonoscopies", but maintains there is as yet no evidence of misdiagnosis.

Dr Abumrad is the only member of the five-person board of UK Specialist Hospitals to hold a medical qualification (the others are mostly financiers representing investors). The *Eye* asked if UK Specialist Hospitals had disclosed Dr Abumrad's discipline and penalty when bidding for the NHS contract. A spokesman said that it had not, because the rules only demand disclosure of any kind of "legal proceedings" if they happened in the past three years, or resulted in clinicians having "their medical registration removed" which was "not the case".

The spokesman added: "Dr Abumrad is one of the world's leading endocrine surgeons and currently chairman of surgery at the prestigious Vanderbilt University" adding: "We have always had full confidence in Dr Abumrad… the alleged carelessness and negligence was solely a documentation issue."

PENSIONS NEWS

Stock horror

WITH stock markets diving, it is disconcerting that under the government's proposed national pensions savings scheme (NPSS), employees will be automatically enrolled in a scheme that puts their money on the stock markets.

Tim Webb, chief executive of the Personal Accounts Delivery Authority, even admitted: "I don't think I would want to be launching personal accounts right now." But he then claimed that by 2012, when the NPSS, brainchild of FSA chairman and former fund manager Lord (Adair) Turner, starts, the markets might be recovering. Sadly this just illustrates what a gamble it is to leave millions of workers at the mercy of markets that periodically go a very long way down as well as up – a fact that rosy predictions for the NPSS still ignore.

Cracks are already starting to appear in the NPSS, as the fees that fund managers say they need to run it have nearly doubled and are edging towards levels of existing private pension schemes. Tory pensions spokesman Chris Grayling has recently mooted using these instead, which delights a private pensions industry steeped in mis-selling and keen to carry on with business pretty much as usual only with more customers, this time driven into their arms by government.

Nor is the credibility of Turner's pensions package helped by news that the former government actuary, Chris Daykin, is now under investigation over failures leading up to the collapse of Equitable Life in 2001. Parliamentary ombudsman Ann Abrahams called his department "complacent, lacking in challenge and hesitant in criticism". The same actuary told parliament that his department had been "quite heavily involved" with Turner's pensions plans.

In a further blurring of public and private pension schemes, the bountiful NHS scheme looks likely to be added to the other generous sweeteners on offer to private healthcare companies. Lord Darzi's summer health review paved the way for NHS staff to transfer to the so-called "social enterprise" model, whereby entrepreneurial GPs, surgeons and nurses form their own mutually owned companies and sell their services back to the NHS. On offer are a generous start-up fund, retention of the NHS "brand" and favourable bites at many new contracts while retaining their enviable NHS pension.

Mark Britnell, director of commissioning at the health department, has told industry journal *HealthInvestor* that ministers may extend the pension scheme provision (one of the best in the public sector) to many senior health staff transferring to private, for-profit health companies such as UnitedHealth and Humana. "We need to do it to start demonstrating to the private sector that this [NHS marketisation] is not a one-night-stand," said Britnell.

The health department later sought to distance itself from the suggestion that the taxpayer would be subsidising the pension costs of the private sector by anything up to 30 percent. A spokesman said: "Mark did **not** make such a commitment," but agreed that pensions was one area under review to "create a fairer playing field for all providers".

Meanwhile as staff at Woolies (RIP), MFI and other imperilled companies fret over their pensions, the government continues to relax rules for company schemes. The 2006 pensions white paper from minister John Hutton implemented a "rolling deregulatory review of pensions regulation". A government spokesman happily confirmed that the review is indeed rolling along nicely, citing a recent relaxation on pension rules when companies restructure.

When the economic crisis erupted, ministers tried to spike Tory criticism of Labour's light regulatory touch by pointing to John Redwood's policy paper recommending mortgage deregulation. They conveniently forgot the government's own continuing deregulation of a business – pensions – that has impoverished millions of victims and in fact needs tighter regulation.

DEFENCE SPECIAL

FAULTY GUNS

ASS? Elbow? Oh FFS...

MORE on the faulty firing mechanism in the British army's Warrior armoured cars (see *Eye* 1223).

Private Eye has learnt that the Ministry of Defence knew as long ago as 1999 that a simple but dangerous fault in the mechanism meant the Warrior's machine gun or cannon could fire without soldiers pressing the "trigger". Army experts recommended a replacement and plans for a simple repair were prepared, but the MoD decided not to bother because of the cost.

The Warrior, which is still in service in Iraq and Afghanistan, has since had a number of "undemanded fire" incidents, including one that killed an Iraqi civilian.

The Warrior has a 30mm cannon, the RARDEN, and "chain gun" machine gun, both of which are fired electrically by using a selector switch and then a pedal. First soldiers must choose their weapon by turning a knob, the "Armament Selector Switch", aka the "ASS". The ASS can be set to the cannon, machine gun or off. Then they fire the weapon by pressing the pedal, called the "Foot Firing Switch" or FFS.

The Army Technical Support Agency found a "serious failure" in the foot switch in February 1999. The investigation was prompted by a serious incident during live fire on the ranges when a Warrior shot its RARDEN cannon without any pressure being applied to the pedal. The surprise shot happened after a shell got stuck – as soon as the gun was reloaded it spontaneously fired. This happened twice.

Army investigators tested the electronic switch and found instances of an intermittent short circuit that meant the pedal trigger stuck in the "on" position, so as soon as an empty cannon or machine gun was reloaded it would fire.

The investigators recommended upgrading the foot switch to a more robust model in 1999. In 2001 the companies manufacturing the Warrior – now all part of BAE Systems – knew that "there is a significant risk of uncommanded firing of the main or coaxial armament of these vehicles". These "coaxial armaments" are the RARDEN cannon and chain gun. They prepared a bid for a "fail-safe" system to replace the pedal, but the MoD decided not to pay for the work as it was considering replacing the whole turret of the Warrior.

Thus it is that a relatively inexpensive repair remains undone and the army has sent troops to war in Iraq and Afghanistan with a weapon capable of "undemanded fire". *Private Eye* asked both the MoD and BAE Systems for comment, but they did not respond.

TRAINING

Wrekin havoc

THE beleaguered PFI deal to privatise defence training in Britain took another kick this month when Land Securities, a key member of the Metrix consortium lined up for the contract, dropped out because it was costing too much and it wouldn't get any cash for at least two years.

Land Securities was to convert a "super-hangar" at St Athan, South Wales, into a huge new defence academy for around £1bn, but it seems the credit crunch has put paid to it raising that kind of cash. Whether another property company – most of them struggling to raise money – steps forward looks uncertain. The problem with the private finance initiative is that although the profits are great, they come over a long period and not many firms are in the mood for splashing out and waiting for their cash. If the Ministry of Defence can't persuade another company in, the whole scheme could collapse.

Meanwhile, the list of compromises on quality that will be made if the deal *does* go ahead lengthens by the week.

Tory MP for the Wrekin Mark Pritchard, whose constituency will lose out when aeronautical training moves from RAF Cosford to St Athan and who has described the scheme as "a privatisation too far", recently raised a host of concerns with the National Audit Office.

Pritchard pointed out that defence instructors aren't too keen on becoming employees of the Metrix consortium (which includes EDS, Qinetiq and others) after the contract is signed in 2010, still less moving to South Wales in 2013. To cope with recruitment and retention difficulties already materialising, NAO boss Tim Burr admits that "the department [MoD] has granted a waiver for the use of the standard testing and assessment procedures normally required for entry...". In other words, standards have been dumped.

Aeronautical training will also be hit, the *Eye* learns, by a 55 percent reduction in the number of "ground instructional aircraft (GIA)" on which engineers practise (there won't be enough room for them at St Athan). The MoD said that "no decisions have been taken on the precise form of [aeronautics] learning... but it is likely to involve a blend of GIA usage and modern learning technologies such as simulation and emulation... The MoD is committed to ensure that defence training remains at the forward edge of excellence". In place of equipment, bullshit.

The latest developments add to existing concerns over the implications for the quality of defence training. *Eye* 1223 has already revealed how an "affordability gap" arising from a cost overrun of around £2bn will be dealt with partly by proposals to "compress", ie cut, training courses by 25 percent.

The military was never convinced by privatising training anyway. A year ago former chief of defence staff General Sir Mike Jackson told *Defence Management Journal*: "I think we are in danger with DTR [defence training review]. In the constant search for efficiency, we may perhaps be jeopardising effectiveness". And that was *before* costs went through the roof and training courses were cut to cope with the over-run.

Foreign legions?

OPPONENTS of the academy, worried that the needs of the firms running the facility will outweigh those of the army, are now concerned that Metrix will make up any cash shortfall by training foreign armies, regardless of their human rights record.

This fear was not allayed when Metrix boss Jim Morrison spoke at the Defence Industry Partnerships: Middle East conference at the officers' club in Abu Dhabi in October. It was hosted by the United Arab Emirates ministry of defence – the military leadership of a country with almost no elections and no political parties, surrounded by similar sheikdoms.

Britain has a long (and not always glorious) tradition of training foreign soldiers for strategic reasons, hoping to gain influence. Under Metrix, it seems Britain will be doing it for the money.

NUMBER CRUNCHING

£2bn Hole in defence budget to be filled by cutbacks

£2bn Cost overrun on defence training privatisation before the deal is even signed

In the Back continues overleaf ➤

MISCARRIAGE OF JUSTICE

Sam old story

HOW slowly grind the wheels of justice - especially if you are in jail and trying to prove your innocence.

Last year the *Eye* highlighted the case of Sam Hallam, who as a teenager was convicted on the most dubious of contradictory identification evidence of being part of a brutal mob which set upon and killed an Ethiopian refugee on an east London estate.

Since then campaigners from the area, including actor Ray Winstone, have compiled and submitted a dossier of new evidence to the criminal cases review commission (CCRC), which they claim proves not only that Sam is innocent but also that he wasn't even in the area at the time of the attack.

It includes statements from three new eye-witnesses who confirm that Sam was not part of the group which invaded St Luke's estate in Finsbury from neighbouring Hoxton on the night of 11 October 2004; new evidence which further undermines the credibility of the main witness who "identified" him; and material indicating that evidence which may have helped Sam's defence was either not recorded by police or not disclosed to his lawyers.

The file was submitted in February, but because the CCRC is overworked and underfunded it has only recently been allocated to a case worker and, as *Eye* readers know, it could be another two years before any reinvestigation is complete and a decision taken over whether or not to send the case back to the appeal court.

Sam, meanwhile, who was 17 at the time and had never been in trouble before (he had been hoping to join the army), has just spent his 21st birthday in Bullingdon prison in Bicester, Oxfordshire. For his family and campaigners – unused to a creaking justice system which can take decades to put right its mistakes – Sam's continued detention in the face of a wealth of new evidence is shocking.

Eye readers may recall that trainee chef Essayas Kassahun, a refugee from Ethiopia, was brutally attacked when he went to the aid of a friend, Louis Colley, who was being pursued by a gang of black and white youths, some wielding weapons. Colley escaped but Kassahun was not so lucky. He was kicked to the ground and at some stage struck in the head with a sharp implement, possibly a knife or something sharp protruding from a baseball bat.

A year later Sam Hallam and a 20-year-old man called Bullabek Ringbiong were convicted of murder and sentenced to life. Several others were acquitted. The only evidence against Sam was the testimony of two young people who said he was present – but they were contradictory and riddled with inconsistencies.

Phoebe Henville made an initial statement to police in which she named four youths whom she saw on the estate that night. They did not include Sam. She said she saw someone being attacked and a bat being raised and swung down and that she later saw a black youth carrying a baseball bat and "smirking".

She had told her friend that she had heard rumours that someone called "Sam", with blond hair seen under his hoodie, had been involved. The following day as they walked out together, her friend pointed out Sam Hallam, who has very dark hair. But the next day Ms Henville made a second statement claiming she recognised Sam as one of the assailants and noted that he had dark hair.

The second witness was Bilel Khelfa, who on 13 October had named Bullabek Ringbiong and described two white boys, one skinny and aged 19 to 20 and the other younger and on a BMX bike, with blond hair poking out from his hood. A week later, he made a second statement which identified the blond boy on the bike as Sam Hallam. He said he had been reminded of Sam's name by none other than Ms Henville.

Later, in court, he reverted to his original statement, saying he had not got a good view of the youth's face because of the hood and Sam was the only white boy he knew from the Hoxton area from where the gang had come. Ms Henville also ended up admitting that if it wasn't Sam Hallam "it was someone who looked like him", and that someone had told her it was Sam.

There was no other evidence against Sam. His lawyers argued that the identification was "wholly incapable of belief" and too weak to put before a jury to convict. But the trial judge disagreed – and Sam, without a watertight alibi, was convicted.

Campaigners hope that scrutiny of the prosecution material, including police officers' notebooks, will turn up even more material which could clear Sam's name. In the meantime they are vigorously fund-raising to pay for his defence and hoping more people will come forward with evidence which, while clearing his name, may also lead to justice for the family of Mr Kassahun, who had died saving his friend.

BRITISH BEE KEEPERS

Bayer and sell-out?

THE British Beekeepers' Association (BBKA) is still receiving money from the controversial pesticide giant Bayer, despite links between the German firm's products and the deaths of hundreds of millions of bees.

Next month, when beekeepers gather for their annual meeting, the BBKA will also face demands to stop labelling Bayer products as "Bee Friendly".

Millions of German bees have died along the Rhine this year, following the use of the neonicotinoid pesticide clothianidin on crops. Bayer CropScience blames farmers for using the pesticide incorrectly, by not applying a fixing agent to stick the compound to seed coats, but Germany withdrew licences for eight neonicotinoids in August. German campaigners Coalition against Bayer Dangers have since filed a charge against bosses of AG Bayer with the public prosecutor in Freiburg.

Italy suspended sales in September, while there are already bans on neonicotinoids in France and Slovenia. In November the European parliament passed a resolution calling for the EU to research links between bee deaths and several pesticides, including clothianidin. Meanwhile, American environmental group the Natural Resources Defence Council has filed a lawsuit demanding that the US Environmental Protection Agency hand over secret honey bee data submitted by Bayer when it applied for approval for clothianidin in 2003.

Despite this, the BBKA continues to accept funds from Bayer and endorses some of its pesticide products (although not neonicotinoids) with its Bee Friendly scheme, which it defends as "constructive engagement" with the agrochemical industry. "Any donation made by the companies concerned, none of which has exceeded £5,000 per annum, is dealt with by the executive, NOT by the technical committee, which restricts its advice to the matter of whether the product can be considered 'bee friendly' or not," says the BBKA.

Phil Chandler, one of the beekeepers pushing to force the association to abandon the scheme, said it made the BBKA "a laughing stock among other European beekeeping organisations".

DNA DATABASE

Sample error

ON THE very day the European court of human rights ruled that the DNA records of up to one million innocent people must be wiped from the UK's national database, the Metropolitan police told Kevin Reynolds that they were finally prepared to destroy his records – but only because he had an "exceptional case".

In fact, thanks to the damning judgment from the European judges – that keeping lifetime DNA profiles of the innocent breaches their right to privacy – Inspector Knacker has no choice but to destroy Mr Reynold's DNA sample.

As *Eye* readers may recall, police already had the DNA profile of the 28-year-old London postman when, in September 2005, he was subjected to arrest, 36 hours' detention and interrogation over the horrific rape and murder of Sally Anne Bowman. Had anyone bothered to check, they would have seen that Mr Reynold's profile was no match for that recovered three months earlier from the murder scene. Instead, he was placed on two identification parades and his father's house was literally taken apart – floor boards ripped up and plaster board removed – in a two-day search for evidence.

It was only after his DNA and fingerprints were taken a second time in connection with the murder that a shocked and traumatised Mr Reynolds was finally cleared of any suspicion.

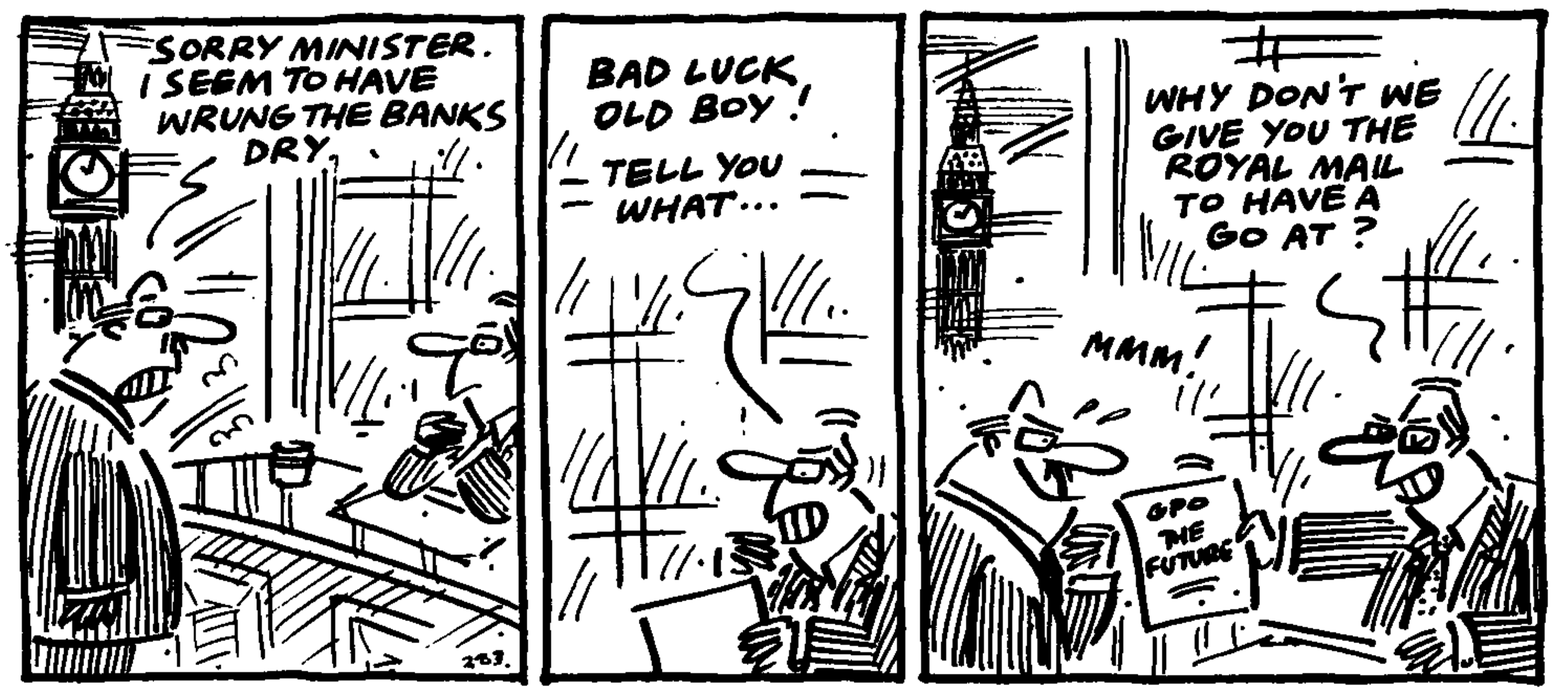
The real killer, Mark Dixie, was eventually jailed for life at the Old Bailey in March this year, leading to police calls for *everyone* in Britain to be included on the DNA database.

As Mr Reynolds' "exceptional" case graphically illustrates, and as Home Office figures collated by pressure group GeneWatch UK prove, collecting DNA from crime scenes has certainly led to the solving of more crimes, but swelling a database with the innocent has not. Since 2002/3 the number of people on the UK database (the world's largest) has risen from just over 2m to 4.7m. But the percentage of recorded crimes solved by direct DNA detection has remained pretty constant at around 0.36 percent.

Gordon Brown's Big Brother government has until March to tell the Strasbourg court how it will comply with the ruling. Ministers might start by ordering the immediate eradication of the profiles of those, like Mr Reynolds, who have no convictions – and think about what to do about the 2.3m criminals on the police national computer who do *not* feature on the DNA database.

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE & RIGG


SORRY MINISTER. I SEEM TO HAVE WRUNG THE BANKS DRY.
BAD LUCK, OLD BOY! TELL YOU WHAT...
WHY DON'T WE GIVE YOU THE ROYAL MAIL TO HAVE A GO AT?
MMM!
GPO THE FUTURE

You can contact the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017 or email: strobes@private-eye.co.uk

In the City

"WHEN the tide goes out you can see who has been swimming naked" is said to be among the wit and wisdom of the great investor Warren Buffett. Wall Street veteran market-maker Bernard Madoff's admission that for maybe decades he had been running not a $17bn hedge fund but a $50bn Ponzi scheme is but the latest if greatest example of the impact of events – falling share prices, disappearing bank credit, need for cash – since the sub-prime bomb exploded in summer 2007.

How Madoff managed to fool so many supposedly smart people and dumb regulators will emerge in the criminal and civil courts in the coming months. However, the willingness of so many US and European banks and investment advisers to give him clients' money in the billions may be easier to explain, given the annual and performance fees charged to those clients for making this good thing available – fees that were often boosted by running the money through feeder funds into Madoff and also by lending money to clients to leverage those positions via funds of funds, which supposedly reduced risk!

As with investment banks and derivatives, a lot of big reputations among fund managers have been greatly diminished by being taken for a ride by Madoff. Bramdean's Nicola Horlick ("Superwoman" no more) may rail at US regulators, who were clearly asleep, but where was her due diligence before she invested $20m, or that of her auditors, PricewaterhouseCoopers? Presumably they, like the investors, just accepted the paperwork Madoff provided from his double books.

Madoff had no independent custodian or brokers, used a tinpot firm of auditors and refused to explain in detail how he always managed to stay ahead of the market curve, providing returns of 8 to 12 percent even in bad times. These were all telltale red flags that other advisers in Britain, France, Switzerland and the US spotted and said "no".

History tells us that when the new money stops coming in and the old money wants out, a Ponzi scheme goes down and there is little left. The money has gone back to investors as dividends minus what the promoters stole and spent. Madoff's $50bn "big lie" admission presumably includes the total paid out over the years from that scorched-earth policy. As for the mugs, aka investors, they lost only what they put in, not what it said on their entirely fictional statements. There probably never were any real profits.

What was real was the near £50m Madoff pumped into his London brokerage firm, Madoff Securities International, which traded with his New York brokerage, in October last year in return for new shares. Madoff had the previous month converted a £31m loan into further shares. These injections came soon after the credit crunch really began to bite. A year ago the company had £96m in cash in its bank account. Where this money came from is now likely to be investigated.

EQUITABLE LIFE policyholders may now have to wait until the new year to hear whether the government intends to compensate them for the losses caused by regulatory failure.

Any day now, though, Equitable's auditors, Ernst & Young, are expected to hear bad news from the beancounters' Joint Disciplinary Scheme tribunal, which held hearings earlier this year into their failure to spot the guaranteed-annuity black hole that brought the company to its knees.

The tribunal is expected to find against E&Y and to impose a large fine. However, both findings and fine will remain secret until the anticipated appeal is concluded – perhaps by the summer. Blaming the auditors might help the government – the regulators were entitled to rely on them - as it tries to wriggle out of the compensation recommended by the parliamentary ombudsman, Ann Abraham (see Pensions News, p. 31).

A BIG drop in visitors and revenues for Paris's luxury hotels in October could not have come at a worse time for the phoney pharaoh, Mohamed Fayed, or for his favourite bankers, the part-nationalised Royal Bank of Scotland.

His Paris Ritz has still to conclude an agreement with RBS over the refinancing of the near €105m final loan repayment due next May. The Ritz says it has "commenced preliminary discussions" but expects the loan to be rolled over by RBS, which holds the prime Paris property as security, into a new and hopefully bigger loan – the normal Fayed plan for dealing with bank loans. But that was before the credit crunch.

With £650m already owed by Fayed, secured on Harrods and its associated properties, RBS may be forgiven in present conditions for not rushing to be as generous as it has been in the past to one of its biggest borrowers.

In December 2006 RBS loaned £650m to a new company, Harrods Property, which had acquired the store freehold and associated properties from a company of the same name, which had been part of Harrods. The purpose of this in-house transaction was to raise a further £300m on the properties valued at £705m for the deal – whether they would be valued so highly now is open to question. The new loan was serviced by jacking up the rents paid by the Harrods companies to more than £41m a year.

That was not the only price of persuading RBS almost to double its exposure on Harrods. This new loan involved an effective early repayment penalty of £54m regarding the remaining £348m loan from RBS, which was not due for repayment until 2020 – the new loan is due in 2016. However, Fayed clearly felt this swingeing payment was worth it as it produced some £300m of new money which then went winging round the empire.

The new loan appears to have helped fund the purchase of a 27.5 percent stake in the Harrods store parent company, Harrods Holdings, for £290m by one Fayed family company, AIT Partners, from another, Mohafa. This transaction valued Holdings at just over £1bn! But the value to the Fayeds is reduced by the RBS borrowings. Mohafa and other Fayed companies were liquidated last month and their assets – mainly inter-company loans – distributed to other Fayed companies.

The new RBS loan also perhaps helped resolve a looming problem with the main Harrods pension fund, where the trustees wanted action to deal with a growing deficit that was approaching £100m. As part of an agreement to fully fund the pension fund by 2014, Harrods had to pump in £50.5m in two payments during 2007 and 2008, as well as increase its contributions and give the pension fund a second charge over the properties and a lien over Harrods' goods for sale. The recent fall in share prices will have done nothing to help fill that pension gap.

No doubt questions over the refinancing of the other RBS loan had nothing to do with the late filing of the Ritz's accounts earlier this month – more than a month after the statutory deadline. The accounts to December 2007 were only signed on 1 December this year. However, the issue of whether RBS will refinance the 2001 loan, and on what terms, has had an impact on auditors KPMG.

The "going concern" section of the accounting policies note for the Ritz is almost a whole page – five paragraphs compared with only two last year, when the accounts were signed off in October.

Once again, but in more direct wording, KPMG – while not qualifying their opinion – conclude their report by adding an "emphasis of matter" paragraph which draws attention to the "key assumptions made by the directors related to the repayment obligation of the current loan facilities" in adopting that crucial "going concern" basis relating to the company's ability to continue in business for the next 12 months.

The "going concern" note states that the company is looking both to refinance the old loan and to obtain new facilities to finance a planned "major refurbishment programme". This may need to be put on hold. RBS is said to have indicated a position that "at least" it will refinance the existing loan on terms and conditions acceptable to the company. Meanwhile, the Fayed family has confirmed that financial support will be made available if the RBS loan has to be repaid. How that would be done is not made clear.

Despite the gloomy visitor numbers for September and October, the Ritz directors are confident that their cash flow predictions for 2009 will hold up. The hotel made a small profit for 2007 after a previous loss, and revenues had been up this year. However, the note concludes by warning that "all projections are inherently subject to uncertainty and there can be no guarantee that all the key assumptions made by the directors will be achieved". No doubt RBS will be looking closely at the real figures over the next six months.

Meanwhile Fayed, 80 next month, appears to be engaged in a restructuring of his Harrods empire, with the creation of new key companies in Bermuda and Luxembourg. A reshuffle of the Harrods Holdings shareholders has seen the emergence of a new Bermuda-based parent company, Mafco Holdings, which was registered in February this year. This puts the Knightsbridge store at the end of a chain of AIT (as in Al Fayed investment trust) companies. Mafco is also the parent of the parallel structure which now owns the Harrods properties via a new Luxembourg entity, Harrods Property Investments, formed in March.

This reorganisation may suggest that ownership of the Fayed empire and its family trusts is being restructured to take account of not just the ageing pharaoh and his brothers but also the interests of their children. Nobody lives for ever – a thought that must be exercising RBS minds as it contemplates the grim prospects for retailing and hotels in 2009.

SIR Elton John does not appear to be suffering from any lack of cash in these troubled times.

The latest accounts – up to March 2007 so somewhat historic, but only signed off in September – for his master company William A Bong, which receives much of his royalties and tour earnings and pays him a modest stipend of up to £14m, reveal that during that year the company paid off a bank overdraft of almost £12m. This would seem to have been achieved by Sir Elton repaying the company the £18m-plus he owed it. As a result, by the year end the company owed the banks nothing but its owner £11.5m – presumably part of the £17.5m owed to other related companies such as the £5.9m owed to the J Bondi limited partnership, which receives the singer's overseas income. Just how and why (other than to avoid bank charges) all this was done, and what has happened since March 2007, is not explained.

IF TEXAN banker Sir Allen Stanford pulls out of his entire five-year, $100m-plus plan for Twenty20 cricket – he says he still wants to play with England if he has taken his bat and ball and gone home from the West Indies – it will be due to the carping criticisms of fuddy-duddy traditionalists and nothing to do with the impact of the credit crunch on his Stanford financial group.

After all, his Stanford International Bank in Antigua had deposits of more than $7.6bn at end June, even if cash was less than $800m. More than $7bn was in "financial assets at fair value" which could doubtless be easily sold. Six months earlier those assets had mainly been in shares while the deposits were mainly fixed-term, with close to $3bn due to be repaid within 12 months.

Storms may be battering banks and stock markets elsewhere, but SIB investors can be totally confident in the rigorous regulation of the Antiguan authorities and the bank's highly independent local auditors.

'Slicker'

NUMBER CRUNCHING

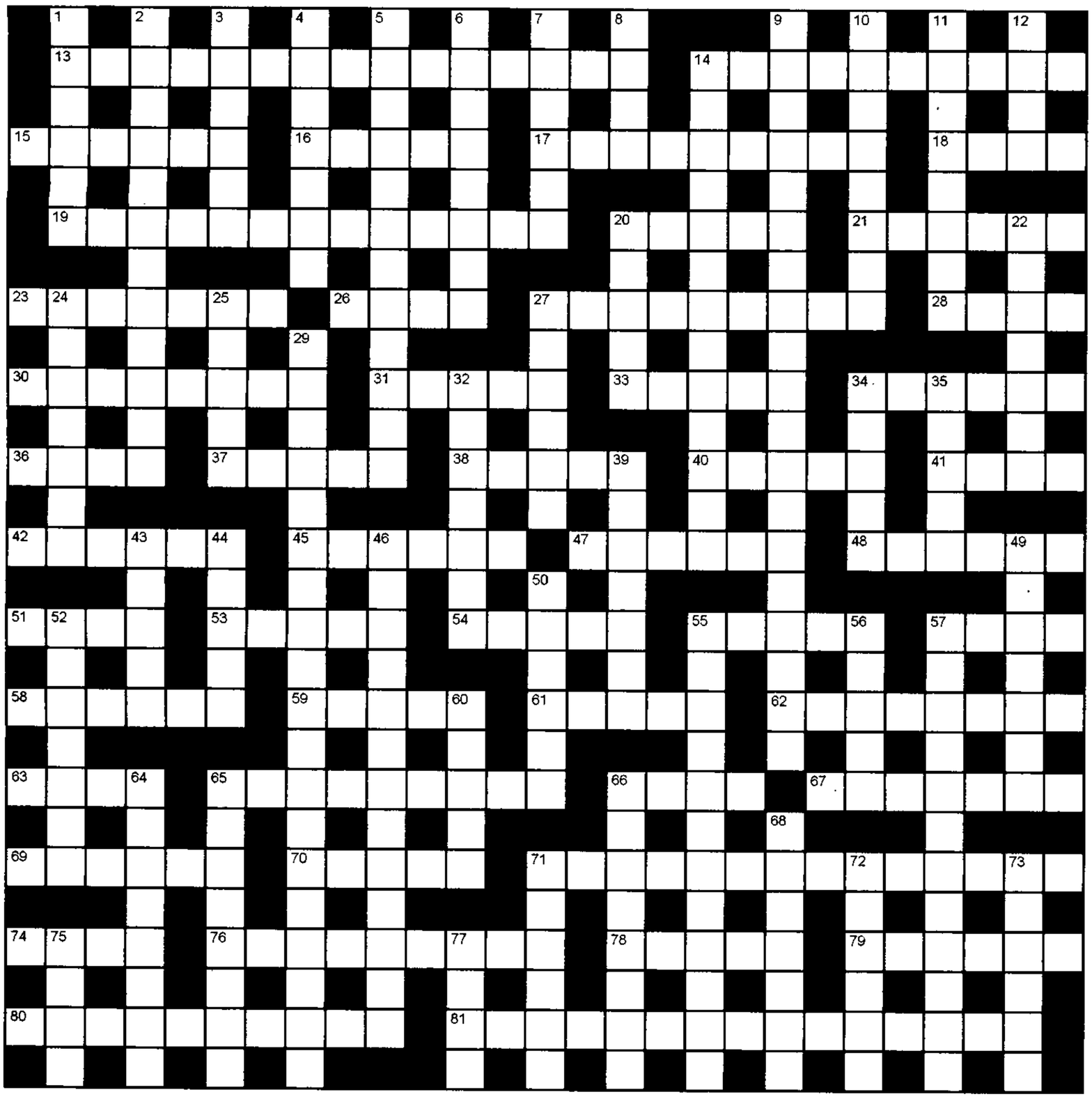
$29bn Quarterly losses of bailed-out US mortgage firm Fannie Mae

$29bn Entire gross domestic product of Nepal

EYE CROSSWORD 381

by **Cyclops**

£250 PRIZE



Twelve clues, lacking definitions, lead to the names of people quoted in Pseuds Corner in 2008

ACROSS

13 This puzzle's underlying theme: university intervening in poor pensioners' test (15)
14 Material for a blow job plus container and hollow opener needed for naughty sex (5-5)
15/28 In decline: screwing around without love (6,4)
16 Frigidity causing Fanny to change her initial (5)
17 The present economy isn't dear one for the Exchequer's chief! (9)
18 Brown's wife welcomed by supporter! (4)
19 No place for Northern Rock getting state cover? Rip off! (7,6)
20 Fanny endlessly bent it (showing wear that's not uniform) (5)
21 Conservative, on the outside, that is, wants to "get on" in this time of severe freezes (3,3)
23 Bacon's description – and his slapdash daubs? (7)
26 See 61ac.
27 Legendary age of Maggie's bitter enemy, Paisley? (9)
28 See 15ac.
30 Mummy's producer, possibly casting blame on pop group making comeback (8)
31/54 Independent bluff on the outside before a fall – end of line (5,5)
33 Strain is about to get to the First Lady (5)
34/74 "Art's orgasmic: about extremely everyday men I screwed" (6,4)
36/77 Those entering this niche in the property market soon down to their last stitch? (4,4)
37 Reserves a good time to mate with vacant divas (5)
38 My common capital dropping 50% – tit! (5)
40 Was an MP, say, given a name "Evil being"? (5)
41 Very green-looking piss-artist? (4)
42 Pressure gets former Fayed intimate out of trouble (6)
45 Press 'break' or the 'X' (6)
47 It's blue, what Cyclops says as he penetrates, grabbing Deb's top (6)
48 English novelist drops old penny dreadful coarse characters (6)
51 Golly with its stuffing switched often sought in personal ads (4)
53 Start of address by Conservative stuck in the throat, getting the bird (5)
54 See 31ac.
55 Underwear (not seconds) for flying (5)
57 Preferred dated number vocalised by Brenda? (4)
58 Big gun, one getting McCain finally implicated in swindle (6)
59 Rustic getting runs on lavatory, losing heart (5)
61/26 Brown brought back homosexual senior (5,4)
62 To go in for auto theft needs energy: don't be a mindless idiot! (4,4)
63 Fine government-supported investment returns? Pull the other one! (2,2)
65 Balls, getting end away with Hague, snapped "Not serious!" (9)
66 Bill, not Dicky, the former president's chopper? (4)
67 It aims to make clients come to be LHR-oriented (7)
69 Sled operator's direction misplaced – very (result of using this?) (6)
70 Affected by the moon? Time to get laid out (5)
71 Silly declaimer about having an erection at end of day (7,7)
74 See 34ac.
76 Christmas Eve suspenders once the Lord Chancellor's habit? (9)
78 Left, involved in fight, making a rather soggy impact (5)
79/49 Crunch "unreal" in the city – nerve broken (6,7)
80 About to get laid, Nigel pissed (5,5)
81 "End of crisis!" Brown snapped, not avoiding the automatic response of Conference delegates? (8,7)

DOWN

1 Maintenance payments initially in Britain going on piss up (6)
2 Like too many modern school-leavers' emails: trite muddled and ultimately shite (12)
3 City advice starts to excuse vacuous advances (6)
4 He keeps hammering away – second heart needed! (7)
5 Fuzzy bodies of poof clerics frantically covering curate's butt (6,6)
6 Cut-off penis not cooler, turned to lead (8)
7 Dispense with Ross's intro – nought inside but a falling star (6)
8 It says something about the spirit of Medvedev ultimately, thus taking Putin's lead (4)
9 Oasis pissed with ITV: instinctive objection to "pussy", etc. getting cut could sum up their feelings (19)
10 Liberal is edgy interrupting disheartened Brown as planned (2,6)
11 Semi-stiff though shagged out? (4-4)
12/43 Some cheek – owes hundreds! (4,5)
14 Hot, revolting, Ukraine fish placed before one (5,8)
20 China seconds condoms (5)
22 Is a brown-nose making up "right good flipping solve!" perhaps? (7)
24 Mandelson's chief destiny crushed by plonker (3,4)
25 See 75dn.
27 Support for those who aim not to drink a small measure (1,1,4)
29 A PC sort of thing, being impressed with lap dancing "broad"? (7,7,5)
32 One who fancies shit in a back road (7)
34 Singer has Brown's number: getting nothing right! (5)
35 Publicity over Clinton's endless erection: "improvised intercourse" (2,3)
39 Cloth one stuck up person's end, itchy (7)
43 See 12dn.
44 Come hear the hearties (5)
46 2/3 of Santa's ejaculation contains charge (depth), followed by good relations (6,7)
49 See 79ac.
50 I got aroused in live shows, member being larger than companions (3,3)
52 City bird's taken to drink (7)
55 Voting against Bush's chief deficiency – US-style screwing! (12)
56 Religious man just holding end of dick (5)
57 Show your front to the players and take the consequences (4,3,5)
60 Smear old politician with gooey stuff, if topless (5)
64 Half of Nancies buggered backs (8)
65 Having sod all, Dicky's languishing (8)
66 Fall from grace: Labour's leader lost seat! (8)
68 Issue of age surrounding Diana and sex reversion (7)
71 Scoundrel Archer a "scallywag" at heart (6)
72 Cruising to make love in a bedsit? (6)
73 Inspecting Cyclops' organ requires insulated nylon glove tops (6)
75/25 Miles with Aitken (time out of the way), raving politician at loud volume promoting extreme right-wing views (4,5)
77 See 36ac.

£250 prize to first solution opened on 02.01.09. Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN. Or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk

Solution to Crossword No. 380

Winner: RICHARD PHILLIPS

ACROSS: 7 Sunni 8 Acropolis 11 Earthling 12 Pubes 13 Pop song 15 Cursory 16 Erogenous zone 18 Bus pass 19 Twister 22 Resit 23 Mouth wash 25 Scotch egg 26 Rumps.

DOWN: 1 Asleep 2 Entrap 3/15 High court judge 4/23 Making ends meet 6 Flyblown 9 Paparazzi 10 Sassy 14 Orgiastic 17 Resistor 18 Boris 20 Trauma 21 Rehash 24/5 Hard drug.

Countdown to Christmas – Last few days!

Urgent appeal to raise £266,437

Help Centrepoint support 825 homeless young people this Christmas

For most of us, Christmas is something to look forward to. But for homeless young people, it can be the loneliest and saddest time of the year. Sleeping on the streets or in run-down bed and breakfasts, they will be cold, hungry and frightened. Some may be beaten, robbed or raped. A few may take their own lives. And amid this misery, the pimps and dealers will find yet more desperate souls looking for a way out.

Will you help us reach out to one of these young people? You could give them a safe place to stay, a warm bed and hot food. And you could help provide continuing support, so they can go to college or find a job and stay off the streets for good.

Today we are still some way from our target. Centrepoint must raise over £9,356 a day to meet the £266,437 cost of providing food, accommodation and support over Christmas.

Will you help give a young person a Christmas free from loneliness, hunger and cold?

Nobody wants to live on the streets

Nearly half the young people we see have slept rough, placing them in great danger. Many have fled violence or sexual abuse.

This is a horrific situation for a young person to be in. Yet instead of sympathy, many face prejudice and abuse.

Centrepoint urgently needs your help to fund its support for young people this Christmas – and beyond. Your gift will help take a homeless young person off the streets and ensure they get the support they need. You will help them to tackle the fear and pain they've experienced. And you'll ensure they learn basic skills – like how to budget, pay bills and cook, so they can live independently in their own home.

Together, we can give them the chance to get back on their feet and end their experience of homelessness for good.

Will you give a homeless young person a brighter future? To protect the privacy of those we help, a model has been used for the photograph.

Sophie spent Christmas on the street.

Sophie's earliest memories are of abuse and violence. *"I was beaten up constantly. That started when I was three. I can't remember anything before that."*

Fortunately, Sophie was placed with a foster mother. But when she died suddenly, Sophie found herself homeless.

"I slept on window ledges, under bridges and in parks. One of my friends was raped and murdered. Another died from an overdose.

"Last Christmas I was on the streets. I could smell food from the cafes and see stuff in the windows. But I had no food and no presents. People walked past like I wasn't there."

This Christmas, help someone like Sophie look forward to the New Year

Thankfully, we were able to offer Sophie a room, a bed, hot food and the support she so desperately needed. As well as keeping her safe, we've helped her build her skills and confidence, and given her the opportunity to rebuild her life.

This Christmas, Sophie is looking forward to the future for the first time in her life. *"Being with other people will be brilliant. Without Centrepoint, none of us would be here. They've helped me change. I feel like a normal person who doesn't have to beg for food or affection."*

Please give TODAY and help change, or even save, a young life.

- **£24 could provide a warm, safe bed, food and support on Christmas day.**
- **£70 could help provide a safe place to stay over Christmas week**
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- **£470 could help provide all the beds in our emergency shelters over Christmas day & Boxing day.**

LAST FEW DAYS

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TIME IS RUNNING OUT

We must raise over £9,356 a day to reach our appeal target.

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Giving homeless young people long-term support and counselling:	£105,012
Total	**£266,437**

Centrepoint, Central House, 25 Camperdown Street, London E1 8DZ.
Registered Charity No 292411

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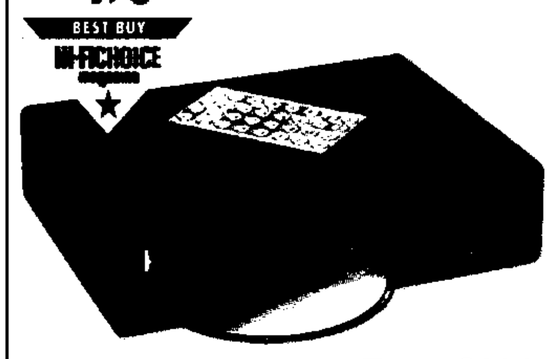

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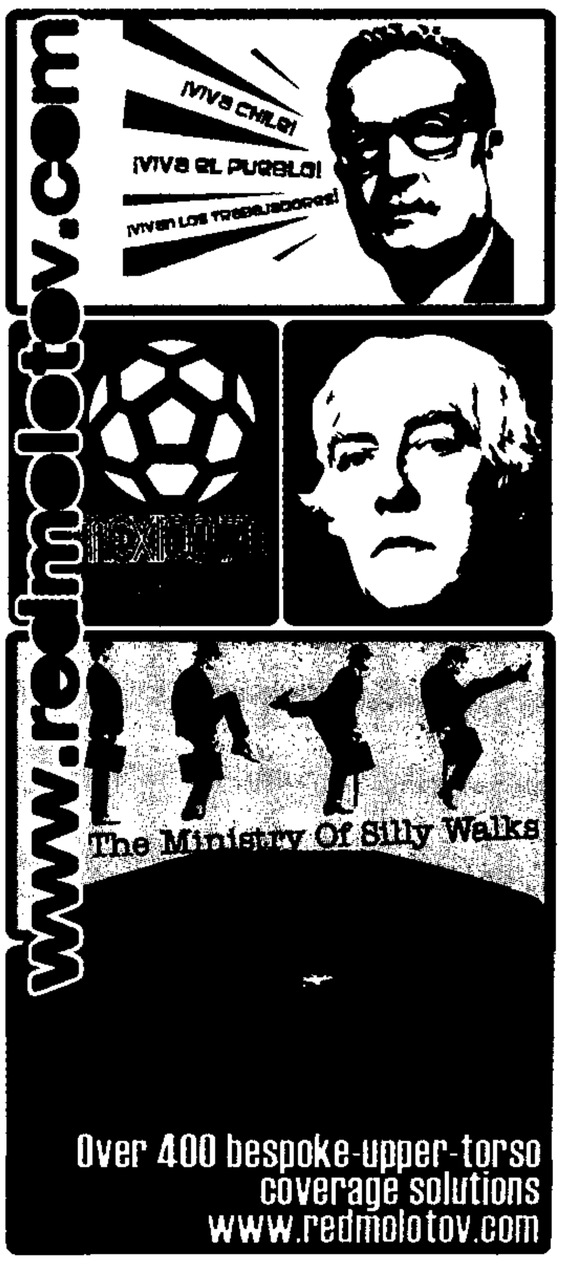

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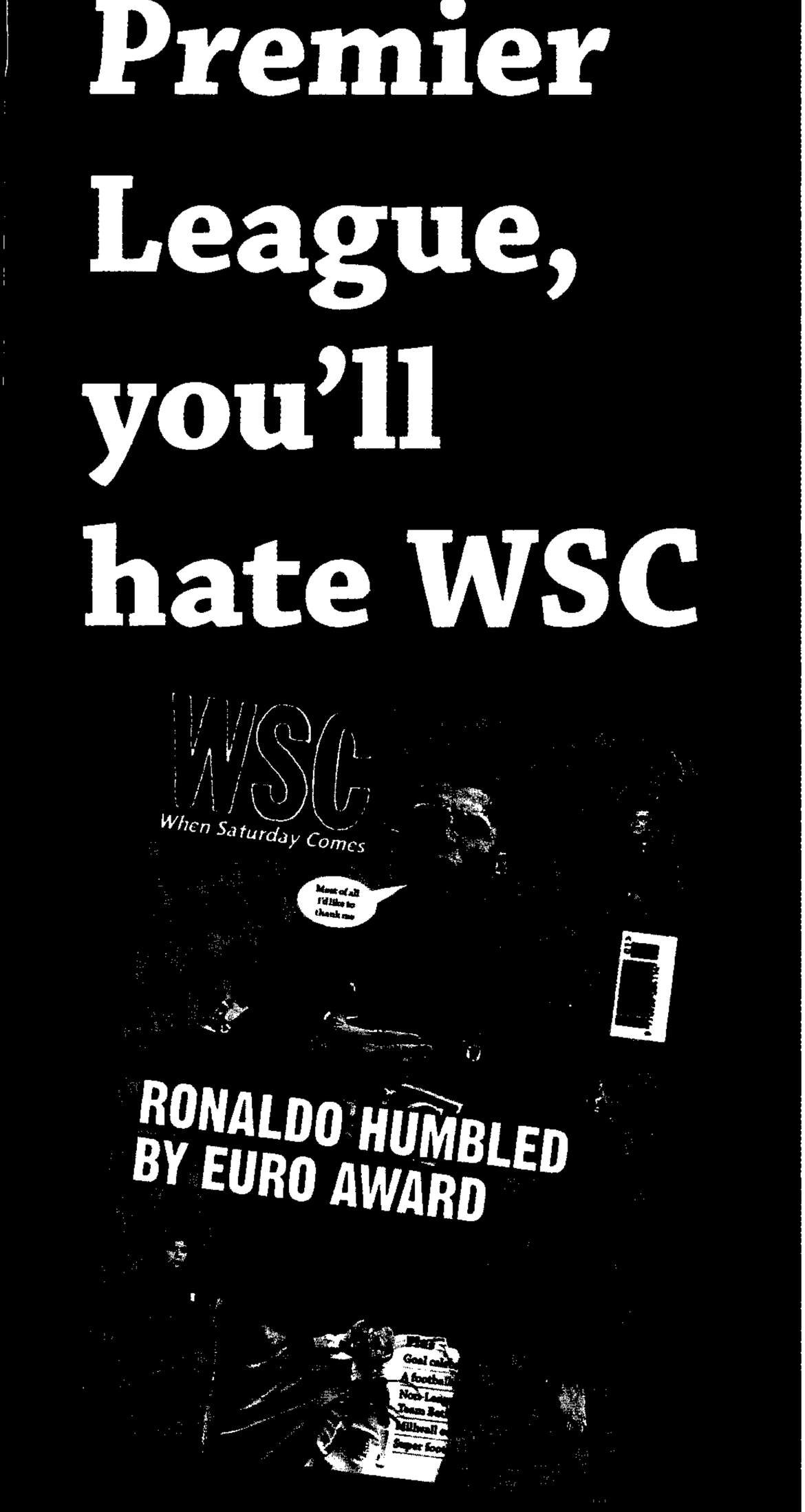

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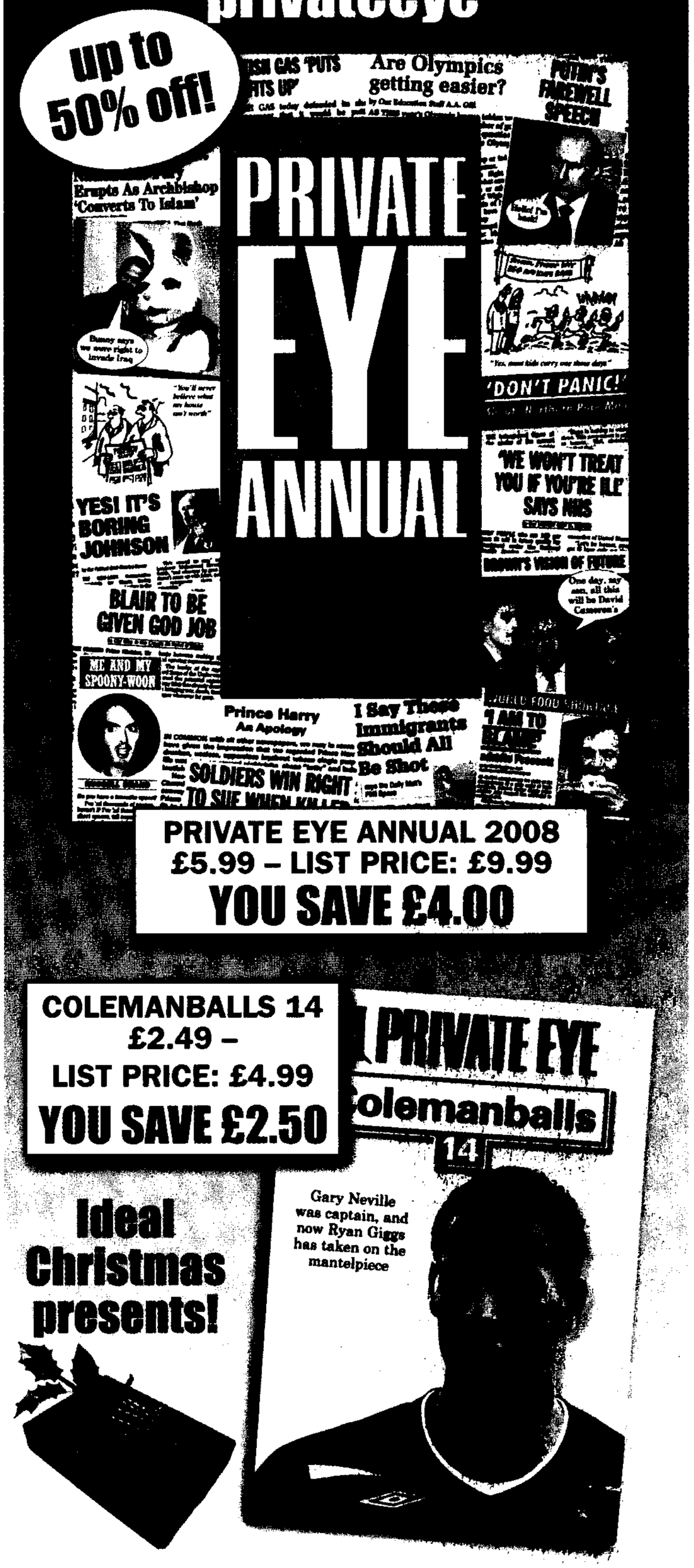
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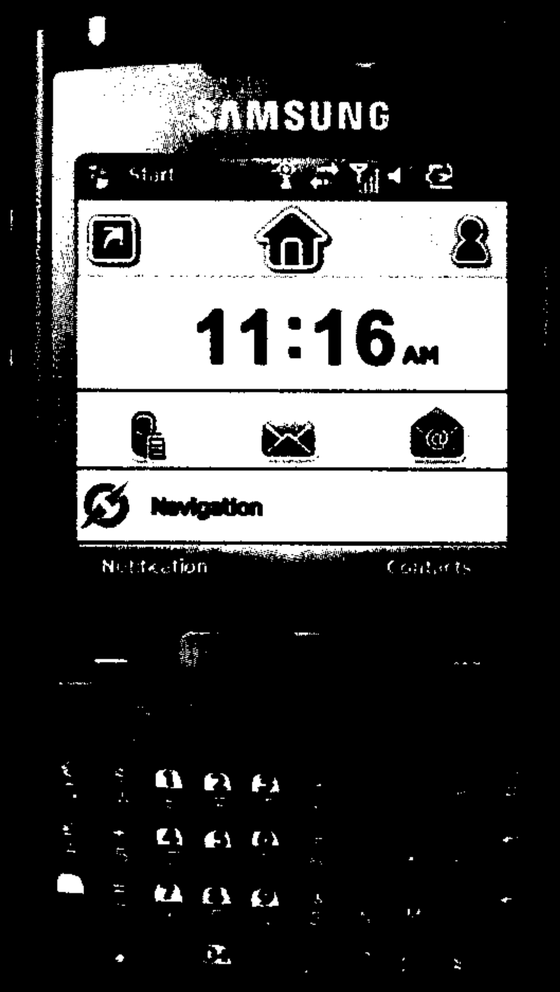

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